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Literacy Teaching Practices and School Reform:

An Ethnographic Study of Teachers' Relationship with Reform

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Literacy Teaching Practices and School Reform:

An Ethnographic Study of Teachers' Relationship with Reform

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the educators who work in schools like Brazos Elementary and who understand on a firsthand basis the struggles and challenges I bring to light. Thank you for your commitment and all you do each day.

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Literacy Teaching Practices and School Reform:

An Ethnographic Study of Teachers' Relationship with Reform

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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This ethnographic study examines the relationship between teachers' literacy teaching practices and the pressures created from large-scale reform and high-stakes testing. The participants were staff members at one elementary school that primarily serves Latino students, with a history of low-test scores. Primarily drawing on field notes of classroom observations and meetings as well as interview transcripts, this study demonstrates how testing infiltrated literacy teaching at the school and classroom level. Organizational decisions were made to support test preparation in 3rd-5th grades, but resulted in uneven support for teachers and students in the form of monetary resources and how support staff were used. In terms of bilingual education, informed decisions determined students' language of instruction and testing, but otherwise received little attention.

At the classroom level, test preparation infused daily literacy instruction despite a general consensus among teachers that teaching to the test was against their own beliefs. The subsequent literacy teaching practices resulted in narrow definitions of literacy

reduced to disconnected skills in isolation without clear connections to meaningful uses of literacy. The ways in which test preparation affected the classroom life could be seen in the ways teachers organized their class schedules to accommodate test preparation, the specific strategies test-taking strategies they taught, and the use of assessments to track student progress and make instructional decisions.

While teaching to the test presented challenges for their beliefs, a minority of teachers found ways to make their practices as theoretically defensible as possible while still supporting students with test preparation, such as through the use of high quality children's literature. Some teachers also participated in conferences and organizations outside of the school as a way of extending their teaching and the curriculum. The findings from this study expand on what we know about teachers' response to reform and testing because of their ability to respond with agency in a context that otherwise positions them as less-than-professionals. These teachers offer a heartening example of what we really need—proactive decision makers in the classroom who can navigate the demands of working in a high-stakes testing culture while still promoting quality literacy instruction.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Student achievement is increasingly "put to the test" as accountability pressures intensify from test-dependent legislation and the enactment of federal education programs such as Reading First that require schools to use "scientifically-based" reading instruction (Yatvin, Weaver, & Garan, 2003). The question of how to promote change and literacy achievement in schools is highly debated and has been taken up in many different ways by literacy researchers, administrators, district personnel, and teachers. Schools that primarily serve students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face the biggest challenges in terms of interventions, takeovers, and prescribed curriculum (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). As a result, test preparation often dominates the instruction and culture of these schools.

These interventions, takeovers, and curriculum mandates are a source of great tension for teachers as their autonomy is encroached upon and their beliefs about teaching and learning are compromised. While much theorizing happens outside of schools about what should happen, it is inside of schools that change actually takes place on a daily basis. Teachers are always doing things. They do not sit idly by waiting for researchers or district personnel to tell them what to do or what is best. The teachers in the classrooms with students are ultimately the ones who make decisions about what to teach and how to teach, regardless of curricular mandates and educational standards (Pauly, 1992).

This is an ethnographic study about the literacy teaching practices of teachers in an urban elementary school that primarily serves Latino students in a poor neighborhood. I sought to understand what happens in the way of teaching literacy on a daily basis, as well as the ways teachers talk about reading and writing, and the sources of influence on their literacy teaching practices. This study highlights the dissonance teachers faced as they negotiated the demands placed on them for accountability, namely standardized testing. Preparing students for high-stakes tests challenged teachers' beliefs and theories about literacy teaching, and some of them sought to make their literacy teaching practices as theoretically compatible with test preparation as possible. The focus of this study was to examine the ways in which teachers navigated theory, practice, and testing while creating ways of teaching that were as maximally sound as they could be in this context.

Research Questions

To inquire into what happens in a school as teachers go about their daily literacy teaching over the course of a school year, I used ethnographic research methods. Three questions evolved from the data based on my immersion in the field and constant interpretation (Heath, Street, & Mills, 2008). The research questions were:

1. How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?
2. At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff members respond to them?

3. In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?

I broadly defined "reform efforts" to encompass any practice, mandate, standard, etc. that was in place to change, monitor, or influence teaching.

Context

Brazos Elementary School.

With student enrollment at nearly one thousand, Brazos Elementary School is one of the largest in its district with 97% Latino students, 96% who speak Spanish as the primary language at home, and 97% who are classified economically disadvantaged. Brazos Elementary is located in a city that is still largely segregated by income and race. The low-income neighborhood on the east side of the city where the school is located continues to struggle with deficit perspectives about being a dangerous place full of criminal activity. Recent media attention from the city newspaper has attempted to change the image of this neighborhood that is the largest Latino section of the city (Castillo, 2009), but negative stereotypes persist.

According to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) report, the school's test scores have historically been at the lower end of the district's overall test scores, although the school has not scored low enough to be considered "academically unacceptable"—a term used by TEA to classify schools that do not meet the requirements to be considered "academically acceptable." TEA established this system of classification (four categories: exemplary, recognized, academically acceptable, academically unacceptable) in 1993. To be considered "academically acceptable," a school or its district are required to obtain

passing scores on the state standardized tests for at least 70% in English language arts/reading, writing, and social studies; at least 55% passing on mathematics; and at least 50% passing on science. In addition, schools and districts must have completion rates of at least 75% with annual dropout rates no lower than 2% (Texas Education Agency, 2007-2008). Schools rated as academically unacceptable for more than one year are subject to closure and restructuring by the Commissioner of Education, something that has caused quite a bit of controversy in certain communities over disagreement with this approach.

TEA's system supports the accountability provisions created by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This national legislation requires that all public schools, school districts, and states are evaluated for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on three measures: Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and either Graduation Rate (for high schools and districts) or Attendance Rate (for elementary and middle/junior high schools).

When schools fail to meet AYP for two consecutive years, they are required to begin a two-year campus improvement plan to address academic issues. According to TEA,

> The purpose of the campus improvement plan is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the campus, so that greater numbers of students achieve proficiency in the core academic subjects of reading and mathematics. The campus improvement plan provides a framework for analyzing problems and addressing instructional issues in a campus that has not made sufficient progress

in student achievement, attendance rate, or graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2007-2008).

If a school does not make AYP after two years, the next step is for TEA to take "corrective action." This is defined as "a significant intervention in a campus that is designed to remedy the campus' persistent inability to make adequate progress toward all students becoming proficient in reading and mathematics" (Texas Education Agency, 2007-2008). In taking corrective action, TEA has a number of different options such as replacing staff members who are deemed as not contributing to adequate progress; significantly decreasing the authority of management on a campus; and instituting a new curriculum.

Fear of experiencing such devastating results puts schools, especially urban schools, in the position of constantly undergoing change. At Brazos Elementary, and other similar schools in the district, common strategies adopted by the district to keep them from obtaining unacceptable status includes curricular mandates, meetings with district personnel, supervisory "walk-throughs" from district personnel, and increased time spent on test preparation and taking practice tests. These kinds of mandates often hold teachers accountable for every minute of instructional time, and means being told when, what, and how to teach down to the very minute (Cuban, 1998). Test-driven instruction thus means little or no time dedicated to the exploration of literature, reading for enjoyment, and choice writing (Au & Raphael, 2000a). Students even as young as Kindergarten are subjected to curricular mandates aimed at increasing test scores, although the high-stakes testing does not usually begin until third grade. The scrutiny

teachers experience to increase test scores is common in metropolitan areas, where instruction typically differs across socioeconomic and racial lines. This inequality in instruction reflects larger trends in the United States and long histories of how children from families with lower incomes are subjected to reductive literacy practices and test preparation (Apple, 2002; Apple & King, 1977).

Brazos Elementary reflects the pressures other urban schools are placed under to increase test scores in order to appease the school district and state educational boards like TEA. Their ability to do so has been a struggle, especially with high teacher and administrative turnover. At the time of data collection, the school was on the upside of experiencing stability in terms of teacher and administrative retention. Of key importance were the positions held by the principal, Lucia, and literacy coach, Gina. Both were in their third year at Brazos Elementary, having previously worked in the same district at other campuses and in other positions—Lucia as an assistant principal and Gina as a 3rd grade teacher. At the start of the 2010-2011 school year, the only positions to be filled were for one classroom teacher and one specialist. This was in contrast to the 50% teacher turn over that had been the norm at the school prior to Lucia's appointment, especially for 3rd-5th grades.

Another marked change at Brazos Elementary related to the formation of a university/school partnership that was primarily made possible by Gina, a former graduate (at the undergraduate and masters level) of the university. She and two of the education professors coordinated with Lucia to make this partnership possible. This meant that professors from the university taught their courses at the school, and part of

class time was devoted to having their preservice teachers tutor the elementary students once or twice a week for 45 minutes during the regular school day. In addition, having the university on school campus created teacher-student partnerships by placing preservice teachers in classrooms as student teachers with assigned cooperating teachers. Another change brought by the university included the creation of an adult English literacy class held two nights a week and taught by preservice teachers to the parents of the schools' students.

Another professor, who was also the director of the National Writing Project local site at the university, also formed a partnership with the school by funding free professional development for teachers about the teaching of writing. The ongoing professional development consisted of a weeklong institute during the summer with additional follow-up days during the school year. This kind of professional development would normally be very expensive for a school to fund, but as part of the university partnership and a dedication to improving writing instruction for economically disadvantaged students, the professional development was funded by the writing project.

The city and school district.

In the context of the school's district, it is composed of 80 elementary schools, 21 middle schools, and 15 high schools. In his book, *As Good as it Gets: What School Reform Brought to Austin* (2010), Larry Cuban takes a historical look at how the Austin school district has changed and responded to larger changes in society. Demographically it is similar to other big-city school systems—with 73% of enrolled students being minorities while 60% come from low-income homes. At the same time, the teachers in

the school district in Austin also reflect the larger trend of predominantly white teachers.

Austin is also similar to other urban districts because of its state of constant reform with mixed patterns including ever changing leadership roles. In addition, the primary strategy undertaken in the district for improvement is to adopt a strict adherence to standards-based testing and accountability measures, and the systematic rating of districts and schools.

The state.

In the context of the state, TEA is the agency in charge of overseeing the state's academic standards, mandating and regulating high-stakes testing, and monitoring school accountability. After the mid-1980s, the agency took more of an aggressive approach in controlling education than in previous times. This shift in role was brought on by legislation for the reform of Texas schools in response to the changing Texas economy. Once a state that relied heavily on farming, oil, and ranching, the state found its economic ties were shifting in response to the tech boom and other enterprises. The reformers in Texas saw the need to change the way schools were preparing their children for this global economy (Cuban, 2010). As it was, lines of color, ethnicity, and language already divided the workforce. The result of restructuring TEA combined with state-mandated policies was the development of academic standards known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) along with a standardized test. The test itself and its name has changed over the course of about 20 years to the present day. At the time of data collection, the test was called Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), and had been in place since 2002. These tests are used for accountability and for grade level

promotions beginning in the 3rd grade. The TAKS test is given in reading and math at every grade level from 3rd to the exit level 11th grade test. Tests in writing, social studies, and science are assigned to different grade levels.

In addition to TEA, another significant point to make about Texas relates to the allocation and reallocation of money. In 1993, Chapter 41 of the Texas Education Code was passed. This law, nicknamed the "Robin Hood Law," required wealthier school districts to reallocate funds to poorer school districts in Texas. The school district where Brazos Elementary is serves a large population of minorities and low-SES families, but is still considered a wealthier school district in Texas. In a span of three years, the district had to give up approximately $200 million. This was a substantial amount of money to lose while also trying to support reform efforts in the district (Cuban, 2010).

Importance of the Study

In developing accountability systems, other states often look to Texas as a model of success. This perception of standards-based reform in Texas is what Haney (2000) has called the "Texas Miracle." He challenged what appears to be substantial progress in student achievement and the reduction of high school dropouts by examining other factors that may distort the results. This study was focused on an elementary school in Texas to show the larger landscape of what teaching looks like under the umbrella of high-stakes accountability when teaching means much more than just test scores. Most studies interested in how teachers respond to reform efforts and high-stakes testing rely on quantitative data such as surveys, or selectively choose teachers to represent

experiences from a range of schools. This study, unlike others, takes an ethnographic approach to examine one elementary school with a focus on literacy teaching.

While it is important to understand the larger context, such as what occurs at state and national levels, it is equally important to understand the implications reform has on individual schools and what actually happens at the local school level, including the experiences of the people in the school. At the national level, federal legislation that demands increased accountability (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) influences schools, but it does not necessarily determine what happens in classrooms and the outcomes. It is the individuals who have intimate contact with the schools—teachers, parents, principals, students—who make change. They are the ones nested in the relationships, conversations, and daily actions of what it means to go to school. While policy makers make decisions and school districts frantically go around "spinning wheels" (Hess, 1999), they rarely stop to ask what teachers, administrators, and coaches do or do not do differently in response to reform-driven policies. It is difficult to determine and understand how exactly changes affect teaching practices, especially when change occurs at many levels—from those that are as close to the students like the form of teaching and materials found in the classroom, to those that are much farther away like decisions made by policy makers.

At the same time, while change occurs on a daily basis, nothing works all the time for everyone. The uncertainty of what will or will not work is grounded in the many variables comprised in a given context from policy down to the smallest of contexts—the classroom. The classroom is a particular kind of community where language is used as a

cognitive and pedagogical tool to shape the social interactions and opportunities for learning (Cazden, 2001; Mercer, 1995). The classroom is also a place that can be understood in terms of how it defines literacy and provides access to multiple functions and forms of literacy (Chapman, 2006). Teachers' actions are an important part of understanding how the classroom community and literacy environment are formed.

> The vital, irreplaceable link between picking the right leaders, adopting the right policies, and implementing the right structures aimed at lifting student academic achievement consists of what happens daily between teachers and students…the classroom connection is the Holy Grail of student learning, academic achievement, and moral behavior—everything else is secondary (Cuban, 2010, p. 17).

This study extends Cuban's work in *As Good as it Gets: What School Reform Brought to Austin* (2010), by focusing on one school in Austin and examining individual classrooms to see the ways in which teachers go about their daily literacy teaching and to understand this "classroom connection" between teachers and students. Where Cuban offers a detailed history of the city and school district, this study uses ethnographic data to illustrate how reform, even when not clearly defined as reform by the participants, and high-stakes testing infiltrate the life of a school from the organizational level to individual teachers' literacy teaching practices.

Another reason this study is important is because it also offers suggestions for how educators might work in agentive ways to navigate the negative impacts of high-stakes testing. The participants in this study were subject to reform efforts that were

primarily in response to high-stakes testing, but did not necessarily succumb to only "teaching to the test." They found ways to support their students with test taking while also upholding their own beliefs about quality literacy teaching.

Theoretical Frameworks

Sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives.

In this study sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives guided my view about learning, language, and literacy, and informed how I studied and approached the organization of the classrooms and the school. A sociocultural approach explicates the relationships between human mental functioning and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this functioning occurs. This perspective views teaching and learning as culturally sensitive, interactive processes in which the teacher and student play significant and critical roles. Learning does not occur from a direct transmission of information, but from guided participation in cultural activities where knowledge is shaped by interactions and relationships with others (Vygotsky, 1978).

People use language as a mode for thinking in which they formulate ideas, communicate them, and learn with others. In this way, knowledge is a joint possession that is created from interactions where talk is used to create knowledge and understanding (Mercer, 1995). Language plays a vital role in creating understanding and is a social entity that is shared amongst individuals. Understanding how knowledge is shared and co-constructed means looking at how interactions between teachers and learners shape the learning process (Maloch, 2002). Important influences on talk are relationships of power, social, and psychological distance that occur among speakers

(Cazden, 2001). When individuals speak, their social languages (Wertsch, 1991) reflect the characteristics of a particular group in a particular sociocultural setting.

A sociopolitical perspective builds on the contextual layers of culture, history, and social settings set forth by a sociocultural perspective by also acknowledging political forces related to the social variables of power, race, class, and gender (Apple, 1996; Luke, 2003). In this way, notions of power and relations are highlighted to understand how power gets constructed and enacted in a particular site. From an educational standpoint, schools are viewed as places that potentially reproduce existing hierarchies, with privilege given to particular kinds of knowledge or experiences. At the same time, the resulting teaching practices are in response to the particular political context within in which the school is situated (Baker & Luke, 1991). Children's opportunities to learn are governed by power where schools both afford and constrain their ability to learn because of the way everyday interactions are supported and shaped by institution of schooling (Lewis, Encisco, & Moje, 2007).

Agency.

Within the highly politicized contexts of schools, it is also important to consider the relationships that take place and how participants are not only acted upon, but also act upon their situation. A fundamental assumption of a sociocultural approach is that through human action and mediation, human beings do not just come into contact with a situation, but also create their surroundings as well as themselves through the actions they engage in (Wertsch, 1991). Lewis et al., (2007) refer to this important act as agency, which they define as "the strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of

power" (p. 4). They do not view agency as something that comes from the internal mind, but as a way of positioning oneself that allows for new ways of being or the creation of new identities. Power is important to consider in terms of agency because of the role it plays in affording individuals with varying degrees of agency that may lead them to resist structural constraints and instead produce self-authored actions that reflect a reciprocity of not only being shaped by but of also shaping the context and situation (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993).

This framework of agency is important to this study because of how it guided me to not only examine how power operated in this context, but to also examine how teachers acted in response to their situation. At the same time, Lewis et al., (2007) serve as a reminder that the researcher also plays in important role in determining what counts as agency because of his/her interpretations and explanations of what it means to have agency.

Literacy as situated practice.

Sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives have important implications for understanding literacy in terms of the ways in which it is a socially, culturally, historically, and politically situated tool for exploring, claiming, or transforming thought and experience (Gutiérrez, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Instead of viewing reading and writing as discrete skills in isolation, I take the view that reading and writing are always situated in social practices, purposes, and contexts, and that texts can encompass many forms (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996). Defining literacy as a situated practice challenges the "Great Divide," or autonomous model of literacy that treats literacy as

decontextualized and an auspicious influence on human culture and cognition (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). In contrast, I view literacy as an ideological practice within communities that is "implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices" (Street, 1995, p. 1). To understand literacy is thus to understand it in terms of people's literacy practices, values, beliefs, and actions. Literacy activities include processes as well as social events and interactions and the various social spaces we inhabit as part of our personal histories (Gutiérrez, 2004). From this perspective, there is not one literacy, but multiple literacies (many different ways of reading and writing connected to speaking and listening), each embedded in specific sociocultural practices and each connected to a distinctive and political set of norms, values, and beliefs about language, literacy, and identity (Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Overview of Methods

While large-scale quantitative studies may be important in bringing information to surface about schools across a city or multiple cities, qualitative studies are also important in order to focus on individual schools and the people in those schools. Qualitative research can provide detailed information about local situations, and about how policy and changes get implemented. This study specifically focuses on school reform for improving literacy teaching and learning by using ethnographic research methods in a school that experienced a lot of change in their literacy program, their leadership, their recognition from the district, and they had a newly established university partnership.

Using ethnographic research methods, I explored literacy instruction at Brazos Elementary. Ethnographies can be revealing about how everyday life unfolds in the school walls and can help researchers, educators, and policy makers understand communication systems, interactions between people, implicit rules, and how reality is constructed for individuals (Foley, 1990; Valenzuela, 1999b). In addition to providing descriptions of a school, ethnographies can help uncover the implications of the activities, relationships, and discourses found there. An ethnographic approach in school research is also useful for learning about the everyday tasks related to teaching, learning, and curriculum and the culture of the school by examining its parts, such as the classrooms, the relationship among those parts, and the relationship of the parts to the whole (Spradley, 1979).

In addition to the reasons stated above, I chose an ethnographic approach for this study because ethnographies allow the researcher to remain open to the particularities of a situation in which immersion and constant interpretation of interactions and observations allow for the research questions to evolve. Over the course of the 2010-2011 school year when I collected data, I designed three stages to allow me to revise my research questions and narrow my interests. In the first stage, which occurred between August and September, I primarily concerned myself with obtaining permissions from staff members to participate and establishing my presence in the school. I also began interviewing staff members and observing in classrooms and staff meetings concerning literacy. The second stage was the longest and occurred from October to March. During this time I continued to interview staff members; observe in classrooms and staff

meetings; identified focus teachers; and conducted an additional interview with focus teachers. The third stage occurred during April and was the final stage of data collection. During this time I conducted final interviews with staff members.

Data sources included expanded field notes of classroom observations, observations of meetings between staff members such as faculty meetings and grade level meetings, video/audio recordings, transcripts of semi-formal interviews with staff members, field notes from informal conversations with staff members, photographs of classrooms and materials, and documents such as photocopies of lesson plans and handouts. The participants were 36 staff members of Brazos Elementary who consented to participate and four student teachers assigned to the school. The staff members included the principal, assistant principals, the literacy coach (primarily assigned to work with teachers), literacy specialists (primarily assigned to work with students), classroom teachers (regular education, bilingual education, and ESL), and special education teachers.

Data analysis was inductive and ongoing. I used the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify emerging themes. My analysis looked across teachers in the school to develop themes based on whole school literacy teaching practices, and also focused on individuals to examine how their literacy teaching practices developed across the school year. I aligned data sources with each other, such as comparing interview transcripts with field notes and transcripts from classroom teaching to look for supporting and/or confounding evidence of themes.

Overview of the Dissertation

This is a qualitative study about Brazos Elementary and the teachers' literacy practices. Using ethnographic research methods such as prolonged engagement, participant observation, field notes, and interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Glesne, 2006), I sought to understand what happens in this school as teachers go about their daily literacy teaching, especially when they are affected by the pressures for accountability and raising of test scores.

The next chapter provides a review of the literature around school reform and the effects of high-stakes testing on teaching. Chapter 3 provides information about my methodology, including information about the design of the study and data analysis methods. Chapters 4-6 detail the findings of this study. Chapter 4 specifically addresses the first research question— *How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?*—and focuses on the school level to understand how high-stakes testing intersected with school organization. Chapter 5 examines the ways in which teachers' literacy teaching practices were in response to reform efforts and they ways in which they responded to high-stakes testing. This chapter addresses the question—*At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff members respond to them?* Chapter 6 answers the third question—*In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?*—and looks at the ways in which teachers attempted to make their literacy teaching as theoretically sound as they could while also preparing students for standardized tests. The last chapter,

Discussion and Implications, provides a summary of the findings as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature around school reform and the effects of high-stakes testing on teaching in order to situate my ethnographic study about the intersection of literacy teaching practices with school reform efforts in one elementary school. The first part of this chapter provides a history of school reform in American schools, and includes a description of differing theories about school reform, a description of two prominent movements in school reform, and how teachers have responded to reform. The last part of this chapter examines the effects of high-stakes testing on teaching.

School Reform

In the United States, school reform has a long history in and out of school walls that can be related to intense social and intellectual debates. School reform is a term that has become synonymous with "fixing" schools that are low performing, and for urban school systems, a constant state of reform is the status quo (Hess, 1999). As a result, they are often filled with solutions that do not address problems, such as having rigorous standards that can seem like something is being done, when in actuality they are misused or used without adequate resources or support (Au & Raphael, 2000a). Urban schools are often subject to the fallacy of the quick fix when "easy solutions" are implemented to address issues that are much more complex than what a prepackaged program or mandated curriculum will solve.

"Fixing" the educational system has historically been a hodgepodge consisting of different programs, rotating new leaders, and lots of trial-and-error, all aimed at

emphasizing “excellence” or “equity” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). It is a process Cuban (2010) compares to putting out fires in bogs—the rotting ground that is the accumulation of moss and other greenery over centuries—where once one fire is put out another one appears. Raphael (2009) compares school reform to Christmas trees. Just as a Christmas trees amasses a variety of ornaments over the years, schools also amass many different programs that reflect different perspectives. Like ornaments, the programs are separate, stand alone, and are often mismatched. Unfortunately, what is good for a Christmas tree does not necessarily work well for schools.

The achievement gap as an explanation for school reform.

One reason for school reform relates to the promotion of equity because of the challenges schools and teachers face by the growing number of linguistically diverse students and low-income students. Related to this is a concern for the achievement gap between students of diverse backgrounds and their mainstream peers (Au & Raphael, 2000b). Students of diverse backgrounds refer to students of color who differ in ethnicity, primary language, and social class from white, mainstream students. Historically schools struggle to address this gap as evidenced by state standardized tests and tests administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Williams, 2003). While students of diverse backgrounds continue to grow, the achievement gap does not narrow.

As test scores become more and more important in defining and determining the future of a school, urban school districts have approached the problem of equalizing the achievement gap between mainstream children and minority children in different ways. A

common strategy is to place the responsibility in the hands of a superintendent who will lead the school district in focusing on the use of standards to raise accountability. Another approach is to mix students along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic status lines. Research has supported the link between integration and improved academic and nonacademic gains (Armor, 1995; Crain, 1982). A third strategy used is to allow parents to have more control over choosing their children's schools, thereby increasing competition among students. While some school districts have been quick to try this approach, such as San Francisco and Cambridge, most schools have not opted for this approach.

There is disagreement as to the fundamental reasons behind the achievement gap. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2004) argue that there are multiple reasons for this gap, but one area often overlooked by researchers and policymakers is the effect summer break has on setting reading development back due to a lack of reading practice. "Available research indicates that the reading achievement of poor children, as a group, typically declines during the summer vacation period, while the reading achievement of children from more economically advantaged families holds steady or increases modestly" (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003).

Other explanations for the achievement gap attribute the low performance of schools to characteristics such as linguistic differences, cultural differences, segregation, discrimination, inferior education, and disadvantaged families as well as poverty. Schools where at least half of the families are low-income, and especially schools with more than 75%, typically experience lower achievement scores (Au & Raphael, 2000a; Puma et al.,

1997).

Another argument is the belief that these are merely excuses and the root of the problem lies within school districts, principals, and teachers who are unmotivated, lack accountability, or are mismanaged. Promoters of this belief rally for the implementation of strong leaders to take personal responsibilities for the achievement of all students regardless of their race, socioecomonic status, or family history.

Two opposing models of literacy—the autonomous and ideological models—offer different interpretations of the literacy achievement gap. From an autonomous perspective, literacy is viewed as a set of specific skills, such as decoding, in which the gap is created from a lack of these skills. The answer is thus viewed as a need for remediation of the development of these skills. From this perspective, the achievement gap is thus described as the result of measurements taken for accountability purposes.

In contrast, an ideological model views literacy as "implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices" (Street, 1995). From this perspective, the literacy achievement gap only tells about one aspect of students' literacy since it is based on standardized test scores. The gap is therefore less of an indicator about students' ability and potential as it is an indicator of the ways in which schools struggle to provide students of diverse backgrounds with adequate opportunities to acquire mainstream literacy skills (Au & Raphael, 2000b). From this perspective, the achievement gap is thus viewed as a social construction based on issues such as equity, access, and expectations (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

Varenne and McDermott (1999) offer a different interpretation of the achievement gap. They question what it means to compare students with one another using competition based accountability measures. They argue that researchers need to be careful about and stop reproducing the socially constructed notion of what it means to be successful and to fail.

> If everyone stopped measuring, explaining, and remediating, school success and failure would in a significant sense disappear…And thus we highlight the arbitrary and limiting nature of the categories 'success' and 'failure.' They are not categories that can ever capture the good sense of what children do (Varenne & McDermott, 1999).

From this perspective, the achievement gap can be understood as an idea rather than a reality in which children are labeled based on scores and criteria, without offering an expansive way of knowing what is and what can be.

Different visions and philosophies about school in the United States.

School reform can be traced back to different visions and philosophies about the purpose of school that came about around the late 19th century as the country experienced many changes that included urbanization, immigration, industrialization, and the widespread use of popular textbooks. As these changes took place, schools became the mediating institution between families and the social order. In response, four main interest groups battled for control over the American curriculum and influence over schools—the Humanists, the Developmentalists, the Reformers, and the Social Meliorists (Kliebard, 2004). Each of these interest groups represented a different selection of

knowledge and values drawn from the culture. The Humanists (i.e., William Torrey Harris and Charles W. Eliot) pushed for preserving the Western cultural heritage, traditions, and values. They believed that the main function of schools was to preserve and transmit society. The Developmentalists (i.e., G. Stanley Hall) "proceeded basically from the assumption that the natural order of development in the child was the most significant and scientifically defensible basis for determining what should be taught" (Kliebard, 2004). By using scientific data about children and their development, they believed a curriculum could be developed that would be in harmony with children's interests, needs and learning patterns.

The Reformers, also known as the social efficiency educators (i.e., John Franklin Bobbitt, Edward A. Ross, David Snedden, and Frederick Winslow Taylor), placed priority in creating an efficient, smoothly run society. Their basic tenet was that by applying standardization techniques of industry to the business of schooling, waste could be eliminated and the curriculum could be more functional to the adult life roles that America's future citizens would occupy. They believed that a school's function was to prepare students for the role they would play as adults and there was no need to educate them beyond what they would need to know. They differentiated the curriculum based on the future roles students would have in life, and included manual training and vocational education among the options.

Social Meliorists (i.e., Lester Frank Ward, Harold Rugg, and George S. Counts) viewed schools as the major force for social change and social justice. They believed that the curriculum could address issues of inequalities, corruption, and the abuse of privilege

and power, and thereby raise a new generation equipped to deal effectively with those abuses. The underlying theme in their work was that schools were the answer to creating a new social vision.

No single interest group ever gained absolute supremacy, although general social and economic trends, periodic and fragile alliances between groups, the national mood, and local conditions and personalities affected the ability of these groups to influence school practice as the twentieth century progressed. In the end, what became the American curriculum, and is still seen in schools today, was not the result of any decisive victory by any of the contending parties, but a loose, largely unarticulated, and not very tidy compromise.

Historical roots of school reform.

By the turn of the 20th century, school reform was grounded in the view of school as a bureaucracy that could be run through a set of procedures that would then produce the desired effects on students. With this philosophy, policy makers believed that in order to create change in the product (students), all that was needed was to change the design of the schooling itself. This model followed a behavioristic view of learning as the response to a certain stimulus.

In the 1950s national policy leaders spurred a series of reform movements to try and fix political, social, and economic problems through the schooling system. During this time, school districts experienced an influx of minorities immigrating to urban school districts in addition to civil rights actions aimed at helping “disadvantaged” and “at-risk” students.

In 1965, the U.S. government enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) over concern for the quality of public schools and the achievement of disadvantaged students. As part of Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty," this act sought to address the achievement gap by providing funds to strengthen education programs and emphasizing high standards and accountability. This act would eventually be reauthorized and renamed the No Child Left Behind, as proposed by George W. Bush.

In the 1970s, as recession hit the U.S. and global competition with foreign markets stirred competition, legislation tried to improve schools in a variety of ways that included adding course requirements, increasing testing requirements and the amount of testing, mandating new curriculum guidelines, requiring new management processes, centralizing textbook adoptions, and developing rules for how children should be promoted to subsequent grade levels (Darling-Hammond, 1993).

Thereafter, the most significant efforts in school reform are best characterized as three waves beginning in 1983. The first wave was a result of the publication *A Nation at Risk* (Education, 1983; Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). This government report sent schools into a frenzy to improve their conditions and students' ability to compete with students from other nations. Policy makers and educators began to worry about how the U.S. sized up to other nations and how it would prepare its citizens for the ever-demanding and competitive work force. The result was a series of formal, top-down measures to improve the existing system and create new policy instruments (Smith & O'Day, 1991). These included more rigorous academic standards for students, higher professional standards for teachers, longer school days, and more homework (Passow, 1990).

In 1985, the National Academy of Education's Commission on Reading issued the report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (BNR) (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). "The essence of BNR was that reading is a holistic, constructive process rather than the aggregate of a series of isolated sub skills and that curriculum, instruction, and assessment should reflect this view of reading," (Valencia & Wixson, 2000). Two years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk,* BNR seemed to be an answer to the concerns for school failure with regard to reading. It had influence over literacy researchers who were involved in making policy decisions at local, state, and national levels. In response, many states (e.g., Michigan and California) developed curriculum frameworks, objectives, and assessments that reflected a constructivist view of reading.

In the late 1980s, the second wave of school reform hit that focused on making school-level changes. These changes included new forms of accountability, school restructuring, and site-based management. This wave of reform sought to remake schools from the ground up (Kirst, 1990). This was a marked shift from school reform that treated schools as bureaucracies. Instead, more focus was placed on professionalizing teaching where teachers were included in site-based management and decision-making. This wave of reform, however, did little to create change in the way of instruction or student achievement. One reason offered is because of teachers' lack of preparedness for the profession, including making decisions about curriculum, teaching, and school policy (Cuban, 1990).

The third wave of reform began in the early 1990s. This third wave focused on changing schools from the district level. Based on a philosophy of creating "systemic

school reform," the new fads associated with this wave included decentralizing the power within school districts, increasing teacher planning and preparation time, changing the role of the teacher from lecturer to guide, the use of alternative assessments, emphasizing problem-solving skills, the use of a variety of grouping strategies, and organizing teachers into teams (Olson & Rothman, 1993). The logic behind systemic school reform was that changing teaching practices would change student learning (Cohen, 1995), and once it was decided and agreed upon what should be taught and learned in schools, then all the parts needed to support this such as the materials, tests, and professional development could be designed to match (Valencia & Wixson, 2000).

Two differing theories about school reform.

The current education system is marked by two differing theories about school reform in the U.S. that work in opposition with each other. The first focuses on "fixing" problems associated with a lack of organization and direction in schools by adding more "stuff" to the school day—more courses, tests, mandated curriculum, and standards. From this vantage point, the work of teachers is viewed as the simple task of following procedures that consist of using materials developed by others like textbooks, curriculum guides, and objectives. When desired outcomes are not obtained, then the problem is believed to lie in the implementation, and the answer is thus seen as providing more specifications about the procedures or monitoring the implementation more carefully. The result is a system of regulations put into place to monitor teaching practices that are often costly for school districts. Through this model, "most major teaching decisions are handed down through policy and encapsulated in packaged teaching materials. It is better

that teachers not be especially 'empowered,' because correct implementation depends on a certain degree of uniformity controlled from above" (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Reading First is an example of an initiative that requires teachers to use scripted, commercially created reading programs that are supposed to be "scientifically based." As a part of the No Child Left Behind Act launched in 2002, Reading First is based on the National Reading Panel Report that is often criticized for its inadequacy and overstated claims (Stevens, 2003; Shanahan, 2003; Yatvin et al., 2003). As a result, Reading First is a controversial area for educators due to its rigidity and mandatory nature.

The second theory stands in stark contrast to the first and focuses more on teachers. It positions them as capable, intelligent, agentive people who can work collaboratively to make constructive contributions to curriculum and school reform (Fullan, 1993b). From this point of view, policies are created that focus more on building teacher education programs, strengthening certification processes, and creating supports for teacher learning through networks (Darling-Hammond, 1993). In contrast to viewing teaching as a standardized set of procedures, teaching is viewed as a complex process in which many factors collide, including variations in students, that teachers must be able to address and juggle. The complex work of teachers is acknowledged as requiring a vast knowledge base about learning, pedagogy, child development, and cognition as well as a need for knowing individual students.

Two prominent movements in school reform.

The ways these two theories are taken up can be seen in two of the most prominent movements for school reform—whole-school reforms and standards-based

reforms. The discourse around these movements has marked a change from thinking in terms of school reform to thinking more about school restructuring. As a whole, initiatives for school change have focused on the redesigning of schools, approaches to teaching and learning, and goals for schooling (Darling-Hammond, 1993).

Whole-school reform.

Whole-school reform, also known as comprehensive reform, is the most commonly utilized approach. It is based on the premise that it is better and more effective to address an entire school through school-wide interventions rather than solely focus on a subject matter, a particular grade level, or particular students. During the 1990s, the number of models for whole-school reform came out to being at least 40 nationwide (e.g., Accelerated Schools Program, Core Knowledge Program, Expeditionary Learning). Research shows that schools undergoing models of whole-school reform versus those not generally look about the same in terms of achievement in the beginning years, and it usually takes about three to five years before results are seen, if the reform models are maintained with fidelity to the reform plan (Payne, 2008). With the right kind of supports in place and the patience of those involved, whole-school reform movements have the potential to impact school change and get positive results. The amount of time it takes to get results, however, can be an issue, especially for policy-makers and administrators who want fast results.

The two most common approaches to addressing whole-school reform for the teaching of literacy come in the form of curriculum-based reform and professional development based reform. Curriculum-based reform is founded on the premise that in

order for schools to improve, programs must be developed and put into place in schools. These programs can provide stability for schools, are relatively easy to implement, and have built in accountability systems. They are created outside of schools (e.g., Success for All and America's Choice) and are supposed to provide well-developed and tested models that schools can then use for reform. Creating change thus relies on a prepackaged, often prescriptive, curriculum rather than on the schools themselves (Borman et al., 2007). An emphasis on this approach to address school reform began around the early 2000s and was popular among policy makers who were concerned with large-scale improvement for a wide variety of schools, despite the difficulties associated with individual school differences, the flexibility needed to adapt to the particular needs of schools, students, and teachers, and the lack of ownership some educators might have felt. Research on curriculum-based reform points not only to problems related to teacher buy-in but also to problems with achievement and sustainability. These programs do not necessarily produce the desired effect for student achievement levels, and raise issues of equality. These programs tend to overemphasize basic skills, and are most often adopted by schools whose students have diverse backgrounds and have a history with low performance levels (Au, 2006). When gains are made in achievement levels, however, students do not necessarily rise above national levels. Another problem is that because these programs are often very prescriptive and rigid in their execution, teachers are reduced to performing teaching tasks rather than on being responsive to individuals or teaching through reflective practice. This lack of emphasis on reflective practice is also an issue of equity as "teachers are not encouraged to think for themselves [and] are less

likely to be prepared to teach students to think for themselves" (Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008b). Another problem relates to sustainability. Even when curriculum-based reform programs get results in the beginning, research shows these efforts do not necessarily continue over time (Payne, 2008). Problems associated with sustainability are also closely tied to problems with teacher buy-in and autonomy.

As an alternative to curriculum-based reform, professional development based reform focuses on teachers as agents of change rather than on specific programs. This approach places an emphasis on teaching through reflection that is closely tied to accountability for student achievement. In their comprehensive review of reading and school reform, Taylor, Raphael, & Au (2010) support the use of professional development based reform efforts. They stress the need for collaborative learning communities where change and the hard work necessary to bring about change comes from within schools rather than from external support. They identified six elements of successful professional development based reform efforts. These are: 1) school staff must have a good understanding of the key principles of the reform framework they are following; 2) having an internal commitment to the change process is important; 3) participants must understand that the process will change over time and adaptations will need to be made; 4) having strong leadership and district support is important to sustain and actualize a successful school reform; 5) high quality professional development that facilitates participants working together in a professional learning community is important; and 6) teachers must develop deeper content knowledge and more effective pedagogy as part of the reform effort (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002; Cohen

& Moffit, 2002; Datnow & Springfield, 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2002; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; May & Supovitz, 2006; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001).

Also in their review, Taylor et al., (2010) found that support must be provided for change on two levels: at the organizational level and at the individual level. At the organizational level, having a vision, commitment to, and ownership of the change process is important (Strike, 2004) in addition to leadership for reform to happen (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Leadership refers not only to the school principal, but can also include other staff members such as a curriculum leader or a teacher leader. Leadership can also be provided in the forms of teams, such as grade level teams or subject area teams. As part of a team, teachers work together to share their work and keep reform efforts moving forward.

Two other important issues at the organizational level relate to the deliberate use of data and the formation of collaborative school communities. School reform that emphasizes data-driven instruction and evidence-based teaching addresses the importance of teaching to specific students' needs (Taylor et al., 2010). Accountability measures extend beyond high stakes testing to incorporate other sources of information such as benchmarks and are used throughout the school year to monitor student progress. The creation of a collaborative school community is also an important part of creating school-wide improvements. By helping teachers to create this sort of community, they are able to develop a shared vision and have ownership over what they are doing.

At the individual level, the development of teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge is also important. Individual change refers to changes in teaching and

professional learning, and the development of coherence and balanced literacy instruction. Professional learning that is ongoing, challenging, and embedded in teaching is linked to the overall goal of improving literacy instruction in the classroom (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Developing coherence and balanced instruction is also linked to providing challenging, motivating learning activities. For example, teachers who work in successful school reforms focus on complex thinking as well as basic skills through an emphasis on reading comprehension and students' interactions with texts (Taylor & Peterson, 2007).

Standards-based reform.

Standards-based reform movements have been the most influential forms of reform in the last decade. With origins in A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), standards-based reform movements have prompted accountability movements consisting of state-mandated achievement tests to hold districts, schools, teachers, and students accountable for meeting certain standards of academic performance (Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002; Valencia & Villarreal, 2003). Standards-based reform movements began in the late 1980s and are based on the premise that in order to change, schools must be viewed as an entire unit, or system, and there must be high curricular standards set along with high accountability systems. To accompany these features, assessments are used to measure student progress against a set of standards. In order to meet the accountability measures, increase student performance, and match the curricular standards, schools are given flexibility to make changes within their own system. Having this form of accountability thus serves as incentive, or possible

punishment, for schools to increase student performance. This means that information about school measures are made public with regard to ranking, and schools that do not meet the minimal requirements are subject to being reconstituted or their students denied graduation.

> Making standards visible and holding schools accountable continue to be important steps toward promoting access to high-quality literacy education, especially for students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To date, however, standards-based reform has not served to close the literacy achievement gap (Au, Hirata, & Raphael, 2005).

Some of the problems associated with this form of reform were found after the implementation of the Pew Charitable Trusts fund in 1996 that funded seven low-performing school districts in the nation (David & Shields, 2001). Some of the problems were related to creating appropriate assessments and the motivation of teachers. While the idea of raising test scores served as motivation for teachers in order to avoid having low test scores, it also resulted in less ambitious teaching. Simply telling teachers what the standards were was not effective. What helped teachers be more effective was when measures were put into place to give teachers a clear sense of how instruction could match instructional goals through intensive and ongoing professional development. The problem with this, however, was that providing this kind of support required more money and staffing.

Another problem with this standards-based movement related to teachers' beliefs about the reform itself. Over the years as different programs and mandates come and go,

teachers have grown weary of constant change and therefore often do not have ownership over literacy improvement efforts. They tend to see reforms as yet another policy change that will quickly be replaced with something else. This lack of ownership is a major barrier to the successful implementation of reform efforts (Raphael, 2009). In addition, another reason for lack of ownership can be attributed to the lack of adequate professional development to accompany reform efforts. Professional development needs to help teachers understand reform efforts, and then allow time for them to apply changes to their classrooms, and receive feedback related to their practice (Payne, 2008).

Au and Raphael (2007) found success in their implementation of a standards based movement in schools when teachers did take ownership over reform efforts. Their model, Standards Based Change Process (SBC), began in the late 1990s when Au worked with schools in Hawaii. Later in 2002, Au and Raphael scaled up the model for implementation in Chicago schools, which have received much attention in recent years. In terms of school reform, what has happened in Chicago influences the development of policy in other cities and the process of change has been closely documented (Payne, 2008). In 1990, the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) was created after the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act. This legislation decentralized the governance of public schools. CCSR was created by researchers from the University of Chicago along with other interested parties to assess the reform efforts in Chicago schools. They identified "Five Fundamentals" for school improvement. These are: 1) instructional leadership (includes instructional leadership by the principal as well as teacher-principal trust); 2) professional capacity (this includes the quality of professional

development, how teachers take collective responsibility and talk to each other about their teaching); 3) learning climate (includes the point of view of students and how they perceive teachers' attentiveness to them and high expectations for them; 4) family and community involvement (includes how teachers and parents communicate with each other and social resources in the community); and 5) quality of instruction (includes how well students are academically engaged and challenged).

The work of Au and Raphael in Chicago has been to create a seven level developmental model of change for schools. It is based on the stance that "research, practice, and policy must be undertaken as a coordinated enterprise in urban school districts, where teachers face tremendous challenges in improving literacy achievement" (Au, Raphael, Mooney, 2008b). Based on a social constructivist approach to school literacy improvement (Au et al., 2005), SBC creates professional learning communities for teachers. This is based on the acknowledgement that teachers learn best by working in authentic learning activities in their schools, or in school-like settings. During this time, teachers work together to improve their practice and are positioned as agents of change. This is done in part by the use of four yearlong, on-site literacy courses teachers take as a way of addressing issues of ownership when implementing a school-wide literacy improvement initiative. This amount of time is based on research that shows that four years is the approximate amount of time it takes a typical urban school to achieve sustainable success, although student achievement can be seen in as few as two years (Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008a). These courses consist of the equivalent of eight full days (or a combination of half days). The four courses build on each other and teachers

do not begin a new course until they have successfully completed the previous one. The foci of each of the courses are: professional learning communities and systems for improving student achievement; student learning; curriculum guides; and portfolio assessment. Throughout this process a facilitator, such as a university partner, works with teachers and is someone who is knowledgeable about literacy research and school change research.

In the SBC process, teachers are guided to develop their own effective literacy materials and experiences. This is in contrast to assigning or relying on the curriculum set forth by preset programs. The approach Au and Raphael take with the SBC process is to work within existing literacy programs while teachers build on the current program's strengths but also make adjustments where needed. In this way teachers are part of the change created in schools, rather than simply the passive receivers of a new program or curriculum they are charged with putting into place. Their model incorporates internal accountability by having teachers use three literacy benchmarks at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. In addition to using these benchmarks to address student needs, they also present their findings to the rest of the school so everyone has a sense of what is going on school-wide.

School reform as an area of study.

School reform as an area of study began around the late 1950s (Passow, 1984). The earliest research on school reform is also the area most researched, and examines effective schools in order to answer the question of what distinguishes effective schools from unsuccessful schools. Research in this area has generated lists of the distinguishing

features of successful schools (Austin, 1979; Edmonds, 1979). Among the identified features of successful schools are factors such as having strong principal leadership, having high student and teacher expectations, and students having a high sense of self-efficacy. Research with this focus of identifying key features of successful schools was most popular and numerous in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the 1990s, Hess (1999) was interested in how much reform takes places, specifically in urban schools, and why it occurs. In a large-scale study Hess examined reform in 57 urban school districts by using telephone interviews. He found that reform most commonly took 5 forms that included:

- Date and time measures- Examples include adding more time to the school day or rearrange the school day.
- Curriculum- Examples include incorporating new components to the curriculum such as a multicultural curriculum, hands-on learning, and revising reading lists.
- Evaluation- This category included the use of new tests, increasing the frequency of testing, and the use of test results in new ways.
- Professional development- This approach sought to improve teachers' instructional skills. Professional development was implemented as workshops or week-long academies for teachers.
- Site-based management- This was a move to shift control from the central administration to the individual school sites.

Research on school reform has since evolved to include the processes underlying successful school change (Raphael, Au, & Goldman, 2009) and the challenges to creating change (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). In these studies, the context that surrounds a school is important to consider as researchers have found that what works well in one setting will not necessarily work well in another (Purkey & Smith, 1983), and if something does work well within a school, this does not necessarily mean it will continue to work well. Researchers have therefore sought to understand how successful reform efforts can be sustained over time and transferred to other sites (McDonald, Keesler, Nils, & Schneider, 2006). While reform occurs on a daily basis, with some cases of drastic results, there is still no clear understanding of what works *all* the time for *everyone.* This uncertainty is grounded in the many variables comprised in a given context. As no context is entirely the same, researchers acknowledge that context is extremely important to consider just as it is important to examine the situation from the larger context of policy down to the smallest of contexts—the classroom.

Research on literacy instruction and school reform.

While research on school reform is a prominent area of research, research that is specific to literacy instruction and school reform is an area that is just starting to receive more attention (e.g., Au et al., 2008b). To illustrate this point, the *Handbook of Reading Research,* a highly regarded, comprehensive collection of the major themes and topics in reading research, did not include a chapter on reading and school reform until its fourth volume released in 2010, 26 years after the release of its first volume.

Studies that do examine literacy instruction in relation to school reform tend to focus specifically on how school districts interpret policy and how that translates to classroom practice. An example of an in-depth study comes from Standerford (1997) who studied two small districts in Michigan for three years. In response to state reading policy, both districts formed committees to interpret the policy and design a district-wide response. Through observations of committee meetings and teaching practices, Standerford concluded that the policies influenced teachers by making them more aware of the expected changes to their reading instruction, but how those changes were to be reflected in their instruction was not clear nor was the support provided to help them do so.

In another in-depth study, Spillane and Jennings (1997) examined the impact of reading policy on Michigan teachers across two distinct school districts—a poor urban district and an affluent suburban district. They found that while the policies were the same for both districts, they were interpreted and actualized in different ways. Therefore, the extent to which teachers' practices were influenced by the state policy reflected how their districts interpreted and took up the policy.

In a synthesis of research on policy and literacy, Valencia & Wixson (2000) found that the two areas barely intersected and were quite different in terms of the research questions, methods, and audience. In policy-oriented research specific subject areas were incidental and of main concern were broad areas like standards, assessments, reorganization, and governance. Literacy researchers on the other hand tended to focus on instruction and learning as they relate to research and theory. Literacy researchers

recognize that their work is nested in classrooms, grade levels, schools, and districts—as a result they typically look closer at actual classroom practices and teacher understanding than policy-oriented researchers. For literacy researchers, reform itself does not seem to be an emphasis, as much as specific aspects of literacy instruction. Valencia and Wixson concluded that the relationship between literacy instruction and policy is complex and depends largely on how the people, the administrators and teachers, use and take up various policy tools such as conceptual frameworks, curriculum guides, and assessments. These tools do influence classroom practice, but the ways they influence teachers and the conditions under which they influence them vary.

A lack of change.

While different waves of school reform come ashore and different approaches come about, the general consensus among researchers is that there is a lack of change that can be attributed to a myriad of factors including the complexities of teaching, the politics of school bureaucracies, and the poor design and implementation of reforms (Hess, 1999). In his book *So Much Reform, So Little Change,* Payne (2008) identifies a list of what he considers to be impediments to program implementation. This list includes issues related to the context, time, pacing, leadership, support, beliefs, and assessments. Payne also says that another problem with new programs is that they do not allow enough time for things like proper training, planning, reflection, or the time demands in general that specific programs require. Along with this, the pacing of the programs may not be appropriate, and often try to do too much in too little time. Problems associated with leadership have to do with not having enough leadership or the leadership's lack of

understanding about the reform. In turn, support may not be sufficient for program implementation and participants may not believe in the program or buy into it, which results in resistance or minimal compliance. Assessments of how the program implementation is going can also be problematic in that they may not be realistic or used appropriately to make necessary changes. An impediment to program implementation may also be due to a lack of program coherence or an absence of follow-through.

According to Payne (2008), when new programs are implemented for school change, they often do not take into account or do not take into account enough the social and political contexts. Social barriers to school change can include factors such as a lack of social comfort among parents, teachers, and administrators; low mutual expectations; disbelief in effectiveness of programs; distrust of colleagues; tensions related to race, ethnicity, and age; lack of good communication; overt influence from negative teachers; and a lack of sharing professional knowledge among staff members.

Another issue related to school reform relates to how goals and success are defined. Practitioners and policy-makers tend to stress different characteristics of success. For example, while policy-makers favor effectiveness, popularity, and fidelity, practitioners favor adaptability and longevity (Cuban, 1998). At the same time, the most common goals of school districts tend to be to raise test scores, close the achievement gap, and create equal conditions for all students.

One reason attributed to the failure of school reform efforts that have previously worked well in other sites is the complexity and variation of specific contexts. Large-scale reforms, in particular, do not necessarily take into account variations from one site

to another. In addition, the way reforms are implemented by local agents, such as teachers and administrators, can also contribute to varied results (Borko, Wolf, Simone, & Uchiyama, 2004).

In relation to why reform efforts may not result in sustained results over time, this may be attributed to factors such as a lack of resources or an underestimation of what is needed; external factors out of the school's control such as changes in school staffing, changes in the student population, and changes in the district related to school planning and structuring; and changes in the context in which the school is situated. A problem with large-scale reforms is the potential for a possible mismatch between what is planned on a large-scale versus what might actually be best at a school-level (Giles & Hargeaves, 2006).

There is no quick-fix to improving student literacy achievement. What the literature on school reform suggests is that change happens at the local level with teachers, school leaders, parents, and students (Borko et al., 2004) and occurs within a wider context that is multifaceted. Attention must be paid to these many layers with a deep understanding about creating successful learning environments where students can be successful. Creating change is not a matter of one single event, but is rather an ongoing, recursive process (Au et al., 2005; Fullan, 1993a, 1993b). What research has shown us is that schools need to develop their own set of answers that come from within the school rather than layering on programs developed by outsiders. Efforts to implement diverse reforms are more likely to be effective when educators at various levels (e.g., state, district, reform design team, school) share goals and work in concert to co-construct

highly reliable reforms (Datnow & Springfield, 2000). This includes the input of teachers in the development of curriculum that is clear and consistent across grade levels.

The role of professional development in school reform.

Research points to the important role professional development plays in influencing how teachers take up and respond to reform (Payne, 2008). When little or no professional development is offered, or if it is poorly implemented, then it is more likely that teachers will not assimilate their practices to those aligned with reform. Professional development is most successful at influencing teaching practices when it is has a coherent focus and is aligned with reform intentions (Cohen & Ball, 1990). Periodic staff development days do not support learning for experienced teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). The most effective professional development is extensive in duration, occurring over time, rather than in isolated moments.

Olson and Craig (2001) argue that traditional professional development has made little difference in practical situations because of the lack of attention paid to agency and nature of how knowledge is shaped by personal, interpersonal, contextual, and situational factors that shift over time. In contrast to traditional forms of professional development, researchers argue that professional development needs to provide supportive contexts where teachers can think, work productively, and investigate their own teaching (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Olson & Craig, 2001). Additionally, Rodgers and Pinnell (2002) argue that professional development needs to be based in broad and systemic-wide approaches. This might include integration of research and practice, long-

term professional development with clear parameters, and ongoing teacher-led professional development focused on problems that arise out of teaching.

Some school districts are beginning to try a newer model of professional development that is distinctly different from the traditional "one-shot passive listening" workshops. These alternative structures are often called "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which teachers, and sometimes principals, learn together about a topic, such as teaching writing. These communities capture the importance of activity in an individual's relations to community, view learners as members of the community of practice, and view individuals as becoming a part of something larger. "A community of practice involves a collection of individuals mutually sharing defined practices, beliefs, and understandings over an extended time frame in the pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Barab & Duffy, 2000). The collective knowledge exceeds that of the individual's knowledge. This is important to note because teachers generally spend most of their time where they serve as the primary authority and their knowledge of the subject exceeds that of their students. At the same time, these communities are important in serving as a training ground for individuals to think in new ways, learn, and try out new ways of knowing.

Learning as part of a community emphasizes the importance of knowledge developed within both teaching contexts and professional contexts (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005).

> Teachers must be in communities where they can actively and passionately investigate their own teaching, where they can consistently reflect on their own

> practice and its consequences, where they can engage collaboratively with one another, to investigate, discuss, explore and learn from one another about what happens when chance occurs in their teaching and thereby, where they can, as members of the community, generate a base of knowledge that goes beyond what any one of them would learn in the isolation which now characterizes their classrooms. (Shulman, 2004)

The list of arguments for teacher learning communities is long. Some of these arguments include: teachers tend to be isolated from other professionals; teachers work in contexts that are embedded in a hierarchical system in which teachers' day-to-day activities are governed by external forces (administrative mandates, parental requests, legislative directives); missing from teacher's lives is the opportunity to articulate and investigate with others the means for improving practice and the learning with those the work. Another argument for creating a community of learners among teachers is that they cannot be expected to create vigorous student learning communities if they have no parallel community themselves. Also, teachers always need to stay abreast in the developments of their field, and teacher communities not only provide opportunities for learning, but also create a space for teachers to work towards a common goal (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001).

Another type of professional development that has received growing interest is the incorporation of professional development into the normal school day so that it can closely align with what actually happens in the classroom through methods such as coaching, mentoring, or study groups (Lieberman, 1995). This alternative to traditional

professional development can potentially address important aspects of learning—that it occurs in a supportive environment and takes place over time rather than in isolated moments in time. It also involves the process of acquiring practices, dispositions, and relationships through observation, guided practice, and independent practice.

Professional development that is linked to student learning, curricular reform, and that is deeply embedded in the daily life of schools (Darling-Hammond, 1998) can be more responsive to how teachers learn and therefore have more influence on practice. Research shows that effective professional development features opportunities for teachers to actively learn together such as by observing each other and reviewing and reflecting on student work (Penuel, Fishman, Tamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). Teachers perceive effective professional development to be a part of a coherent program (Stein & D'Amico, 2002) that involves "collective participation" (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, Yoon, 2001). This may come in the form of groups of teachers working together from the same school, grade level, or department.

Many researchers argue that the same sort of reforms that have been proposed for children—inquiry-based communities—should also be used with teachers (Shulman, 2004). Teacher inquiry is a disposition in which dilemmas are reframed as questions, and data are collected and analyzed for patterns and answers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Hubbard & Power, 1999). Teacher inquiry begins with genuine questions and includes collecting data, inquiry, collecting ideas, and redesigning practice. Teacher inquiry groups (Ballenger, 2004; O'Donnell-Allen, 2001; Rogers, Mosley, & Kramer, 2009) are alternatives to traditional professional development that account for the interactions

between time, place, people, ideas, and personal growth that make teacher learning possible. In addition, these groups can be a place for teachers to be in control of the questions that are asked and answered in the classroom. Adopting an inquiry as stance approach positions teachers as lifelong learners working together in inquiry communities to generate knowledge, envision, theorize their practice, interpret, and interrogate the theory and research of others. Teachers work in inquiry communities in a common search for meaning in their work lives. Over time, communities that support inquiry develop their own histories and a culture—a common discourse, shared experiences, and a set of procedures.

Theory should not only seek to influence practice, but it should grow out of practice. One way for this to happen is for practitioners to use their classrooms as a place to investigate the relationship between vision and practice (Wells, 2001). Professional development that promotes teacher inquiry and communities of practice has the potential to make unique contributions to professional knowledge development and educational reform and are invaluable for supporting individual teachers.

Teachers' response to reform.

While policies, programs, mandates, and initiatives change from year to year, what remains constant is that the ones in charge of implementing changes are the teachers in the classrooms. The reasons for how or if they implement such changes is so varied that it is difficult to make a broad sweeping generalization as to what conditions make this possible. Some of these variables are based on individual differences between teachers while other factors reside in the context. Individual differences include factors

such as background knowledge, experiences, existing practices, beliefs, values, sense of accountability pressures, and the teaching context (Goertz, Floden, & O'Day, 1995; Spillane, 1999; Standerford, 1997; Valencia & Wixson, 2001). Another characteristic that might influence how individual teachers react to reform relates to their own sense of personal and professional investments in their career. Reform may be threatening, in particular for experienced teachers, as it may require a whole new way of teaching to replace what they were previously doing "wrong." Teachers' reactions to new reforms can range on a continuum from completely changing their understandings and instruction to fit the reform to adopting only surface level features, or discounting and resisting the new reform all together (Cohen & Ball, 1990).

Factors associated with context also seem to be important in determining how teachers will take up new reform efforts. These factors include the school culture, students, the support offered to implement changes, and the professional development provided to accompany changes. In a study of teachers' response to a mathematics reform in Michigan, Spillane (1999) found that the most important factor in determining how teachers implemented the reform was what he called "zone of enactment." This term refers to the space teachers had to make sense of their own practice in relation to the new practices set forth by reform. These enactment zones can be either more social or individual in nature. Teachers with social enactment zones were engaged in sustained interactions with colleagues and reform experts about the policy reforms in addition to having access to many artifacts and resources to help them enact the reforms. These teachers changed their practices more than the teachers whose zones of enactment were

more individualistic. These teachers interacted much less if at all with their colleagues about the reforms. When they did interact, their involvement was centered on ideas for teaching rather than engagement in deep conversations about the reform itself.

Similarly, Maloch and Worthy (forthcoming) studied what happens when two teachers hear the same information and have the same expectations set up for them with regard to reform. They researched two first grade teachers' understanding of and implementations of their district's initiative to change the literacy program. All of the teachers in the school district participated in intensive professional development. The ways in which the two teachers implemented the recommended practices varied and Maloch and Worthy concluded that it was the different ways the two teachers made sense of the reform that mattered the most. Their sense-making included their beliefs, values, interpretations of the principles and practices of the reform, the ways they used their available resources—both material and human, their interaction with others, and the decisions they made daily.

High-stakes Testing

In response to test-dependent policies, which called for states to establish performance goals along with tests for students in grades 3-8, the business of high-stakes testing to promote accountability has become key to educational reform for policy makers. This movement towards "excellence" and "equity" reflects policy makers' concerns for achievement at the school level through the use of standards and high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing highlights the political landscape of schooling, and with such

an emphasis, the quality of public schools has become characterized by test scores rather than other indicators (Brandt, 2007).

These state created and administered tests are considered "high-stakes" because of their weight in making decisions about grade level promotion, graduation for students, and other important decisions that affect school communities (Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Madaus, 1988). Some also consider the publication of test results as another dimension that adds to its being "high-stakes" (McNeil, 2000). While policy makers may suggest the positive impact of high-stakes testing in terms of the raising of scores (Linn, 2000; Popham, 1987), most educational researchers would argue that this measurement of success is arbitrary and "an illusion that masks an intrusion of testing into good teaching" (Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001, p. 482). While data supports the position that high-stakes testing has increased test scores, it is still unclear whether this is a result of increased student achievement or the result of test preparation and/or the exclusion of some students from the testing pool (students who receive special education support) (Amrein, 2002).

Supporters of high-stakes testing, as outlined in test-dependent policies at the national and state levels, make arguments for their use for reasons that include: students will work harder and learn more; students and teachers need them to know what is important to learn; they will motivate teachers to teach better; and they are good measures of what is taught in school (Paris, 2000). Despite the fact that all of these claims have been disputed and shown to be flawed by researchers, high-stakes testing has infiltrated American schools. Nichols and Berliner (2007) believe this can be attributed to

five reasons: 1) the ways accountability in education are modeled after corporate efforts to raise productivity; 2) the belief that the future of the economy relies on a highly educated workforce; 3) as a policy mechanism to preserve social status; 4) because those in power along with middle and upper-middle class see the system as working to their children's advantage; and 5) high-stakes testing fits into the American culture where competition is valued.

Research on the affects of high-stakes standardized tests has found that an overemphasis on testing leads to a narrowing of the curriculum with a focus on basic skills and test preparation. In addition, because teachers are pressured to "teach to the test," they generally spend more time teaching tested objectives with little or no attention paid to untested objectives (Shepard, 1990); use materials that resemble the tests (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985); and take instructional time away from non-tested subjects like social studies and science (Jacob, 2005). There is also a positive correlation between the greater the stakes of a test and the amount of time spent on test preparation (Herman & Golan, 1991). Decontextualized test preparation, or teaching to the test, reduces teaching to an act of raising test scores through drill on practice items, even to the extent of replacing the curriculum with test preparation (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001), and diminishes teaching practices to the level of answering multiple-choice questions since the pressure is so great to succeed on them (Smith, 1991).

In their study of three elementary schools, Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber, and Buese (2008) sought to understand how high-stakes testing affected daily life. They investigated the ways that three different schools in the same district interpreted and

implemented policy standards in order to address testing accountability. They concluded that because these schools were taxed with the challenge of making achievement gains in a limited amount of time, they took the most expedited measures they could, which supports other research on how schools respond to high-stakes testing—narrowing the curriculum, grouping students by ability, teaching to the test, and organizing the school activities around testing requirements.

Using qualitative meta-analysis, Au (2007) reviewed 49 qualitative studies related to high-stakes testing in the United States. He found there is a significant relationship between the implementation of high-stakes testing and changes in the curriculum at three levels: control of the content (mainly narrowing of the curriculum), control of the format (generally resulting in fragmenting the curriculum into smaller, isolated parts), and pedagogical control (largely the use of teacher-centered practices). Au concluded that high-stakes tests encourage curricular alignment to the tests and that high-stakes accountability provides external control over teaching (Moe, 2003).

Many studies that research the impact of high-stakes testing on teachers have found that although teachers have negative views of standardized tests (e.g., Haladyna, Nolen, & Haas, 1991; Moore, 1994; Urdan & Paris, 1994), they still spend a large amount of time and energy preparing students for the tests (Hoffman et al., 2001). Raising test scores is perceived as an immediate obligation of teaching because of the import placed on them, especially when test scores are made available as public knowledge. Such pressure has negative effects on teachers' affect (Johnston, Guice, Baker, Malone, & Michelson, 1995; Smith, 1991). The intense pressure placed on

teachers also raises ethical concerns about testing practices and systems of educational measurement (Haladyna et al., 1991; McNeil, 2000). High-stakes tests have been found to lead to inflated test scores (Herman & Golan, 1993; Resnick & Resnick, 1992).

In a study of teachers' perceptions of standardized tests, Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) found that teachers were emotionally affected by testing (Smith, 1991) and felt powerless when it came to test preparation. While they felt their instruction suffered because of test preparation, they succumbed to altering their teaching practices because of the emphasis placed on test scores. They found four general ways in which teachers prepared students for tests: teaching information directly related to test content; using class time to practice test taking with materials that mirrored the tests; teaching test taking strategies; and making test preparation a part of daily instruction.

Boardman and Woodruff (2004) found that statewide assessments have a significant impact on teaching, and teachers often use the tests as a reference point to decide whether or not to adapt a new instructional practice. If teachers perceive a new practice as supporting test-preparation goals, such as teaching to the test or raising scores, they are more likely to adopt the new practice. If the practice does not seem to support testing, teachers may not implement the new practice or will adapt it to be more aligned with test preparation goals.

The kind of teaching which results from the severe pressure to raise test scores is often controlled and conflicts with teachers' understanding of excellent teaching, especially for students from diverse backgrounds (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). Such practices often create inequities in schooling (Camilli & Monfils, 2004) and raise

concerns for the quality of instruction such as whether or not teachers are able to take into account the sociocultural needs of their students (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). Researchers have cautioned against the use of high-stakes testing because of the potentially damaging effects it has on teaching, teachers, and students. In particular, researchers are concerned with the negative effects of high-stakes testing on minority and low-performing students in terms of graduation rates and the over classification of minority students in special education, which exempts them from taking the same standardized tests as their peers (Figlio, & Getzler, 2002; Haney, 2000; Valenzuela, 2005).

Teaching under the regime of high-stakes testing puts teachers in difficult situations to navigate accountability pressures and still teach in academically challenging, student-centered ways. In a study of how 10 teachers tackled this challenge, Sleeter and Stillman (2007) drew on the case studies of elementary and middle school teachers in California who worked in underperforming schools. Grounded in the research that indicates a qualified teacher is the greatest influence on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000), Sleeter and Stillman found that the strategies these teachers enacted to navigate standards and accountability pressures included prioritizing standards to address the problem of too many standards to cover; organizing content around meaningful, culturally relevant material; creating a culture of going to college in the classroom; and using social learning and collaborative teaching processes.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted important research on school reform and high-stakes testing to foreground the central ideas that are fundamental to this study, and to make an argument for the importance of this study. I have examined school reform to show its history in American schools, how different parties view school reform, and to show the need for more research that examines school reform in relation to literacy instruction. I also examined high-stakes testing to show the impact it has on teaching. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I continue these lines of thinking by showing how school reform is tied to high-stakes testing. In particular, I focus on literacy teaching practices and the ways in which the teachers and staff members at Brazos Elementary responded to accountability pressures. How I examine my data with regard to school reform and high-stakes testing are guided by the theoretical frameworks I described in chapter 1, where understanding the political context and people's agency to take up certain positions in this context are important.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This is an ethnographic study that examines the intersection between literacy teaching practices and school reform efforts in one elementary school. I sought to understand the social, cultural, and political contexts in which the teachers worked in order to examine their literacy teaching practices and how they were influenced by accountability measures and standards in response to high-stakes testing. I collected data for one school year, including the two weeks prior to the first day of school when teachers set up their classrooms and planned for the coming school year. I used ethnographic research methods to explore three guiding questions. These questions are:

1. How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?
2. At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff members respond to them?
3. In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?

I defined "reform efforts" as any practice, mandate, or standard that aimed to change, influence, control, or monitor literacy teaching practices. In the following sections I discuss my research methodology; the school I have chosen as a site; my positionality; my data sources and data collection schedule; and my data analysis methods.

Research Methodology

I collected data over the 2010-2011 school year from August to April using ethnographic research methods. Ethnographic research is primarily concerned with creating a written representation of a cultural group, for example, the people who inhabit a school on a daily basis. The focus is on gaining understanding from an *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspective through long-term immersion in the field (Foley, 2002; Heath et al., 2008; Van Maanen, 1988). Ethnographic research has gained popularity in the field of education over the last 30 years, particularly for researchers interested in understanding the cultural practices of schools as they are lived in and experienced by their inhabitants (Werner & Rothe, 1980). Ethnographies can be revealing about how everyday life unfolds in the school walls and can help understand communication systems, interactions between people, implicit rules, and how reality is constructed for individuals. In addition to providing descriptions of a school, ethnographies can help uncover the implications of the activities, relationships, and discourses found there. In her ethnography that looked at children learning to use language at home and school, (Heath, 1983) explained that schools are not neutral objective arenas. They are institutions with the goal of changing people's values, skills, and knowledge bases. Some portions of the population bring with them linguistic and cultural capital accumulated through occasions for practicing the skills and values that schools transmit. Long before school, their language and culture at home has structured for them the meanings that will give shape to their experiences in classrooms.

An ethnographic approach in school research is also useful for learning about the everyday tasks related to teaching, learning, and curriculum. In this study, the curriculum I am primarily interested in relates to the teaching of reading and writing. I view curriculum as the educational materials, the structure of the learning environment, the social interactions in the learning settings, and the learning activities (Walker, 1982). I also view it as "a process in which there is constant interpretation and negotiation going on among teachers and students" (Werner & Rothe, 1980). Because teachers are the means through which the curriculum gets interpreted and taught on a daily basis, they were my focus and primary way of understanding the teaching of literacy in the school. This necessitated prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in classrooms to understand the work of teachers and how the classroom community and literacy environment were formed. The classroom is a particular kind of community where language is used as a cognitive and pedagogical tool to shape the social interactions and opportunities for learning (Cazden, 2001; Mercer, 1995). The classroom is also a place that can be understood in terms of how it defines literacy and provides access to multiple functions and forms of literacy (Chapman, 2006). To understand how literacy is defined, either implicitly or explicitly, I paid close attention to features such as the kinds of reading and writing students were asked to do, the discourses of the teacher and students about reading and writing, and the environmental print in classrooms.

Another reason I used ethnographic methods related to the ways schools are nested within larger social and political contexts. While I am interested in one particular school, I feel it is important to acknowledge that schools and the classrooms inside of

those schools are never isolated from what lays beyond the school grounds. Schools are socially and culturally situated within larger contexts. All of the events in a school and the actions, beliefs, values, and histories of those inside of the school interact with each other and reflect larger societal issues. Taking an ethnographic approach in order to understand the cultural space of a school can help to reveal the intricacies of relationships and structures, including issues related to access, participation, and power (Foley, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999a). My research describes the cultural features of the school from spending time in individual classrooms and in meetings, and interviewing individuals over the course of an entire school year using systematic data collection. Taking an ethnographic approach allowed me to research the culture of the school by examining its parts, such as the classrooms, the relationship among those parts, and the relationship of the parts to the whole (Spradley, 1979).

Ethnographic methods require a large time commitment. Because the researcher is the primary tool for data collection, he/she must spend a substantial amount of time in the field to observe, collect data, and produce descriptive data (Glesne, 2006). This requires that the researcher be able to spend the time necessary in the field and be free to enter and reenter the space. In the year in which I collected data, my schedule allowed me to spend the time necessary at Brazos Elementary, and I had access to the school because of my involvement with the university partnership formed in January of 2010.

Another challenge of doing ethnographic research relates to the flexibility required in collecting data. In ethnographic research, the methods are open to what happens in the field, which requires that the researcher be flexible in the ways and kinds

of data that are obtained. To address this, I collected multiple forms of data such as observational field notes, video recordings, interview transcripts, photographs, and artifacts such as photocopies of lesson plans and papers handed out in classes. Because the participants were teachers with busy and often changing schedules, another challenge related to forming a trusting relationship with them and fitting into their time schedules. My schedule allowed me to be flexible in order to work with the schedules of my participants.

Context

Brazos Elementary is one of the largest elementary schools in the district with student enrollment approaching one thousand. The school is located near a major highway in a neighborhood that is often construed as "dangerous" and "poor." In a recent city newspaper article, the neighborhood was described as changing for the better while trying to leave behind images of "gangs, drugs, and violent crimes" (Castillo, 2009). The neighborhood is cited as the largest Latino enclave in the city. There are seven other elementary schools and a middle school within a two-mile radius of the school, which reflects the dense population of children in the area. Because of the location of the school, all children are required to walk or ride in a car to school, as the district does not provide school buses due to the close proximity of children's homes to the school. The year data were collected, 97% of the students were Latino, 2% were African American, and less than 1% were Anglo. Ninety-six percent of the students' parents indicated that Spanish was spoken at home on registration information. Ninety-seven percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch based on household income. Seventy

percent of the students were enrolled in a Bilingual or ESL classroom. Overall there was a low mobility rate for students and low percentage of recent immigrants. Most Latino students were second or third generation immigrants.

Participants

There were a total of 41 participants. This included 26 classroom teachers (Pre-Kindergarten-5th grade), 3 special education teachers, 2 reading specialists (primarily assigned to work with students), 3 instructional coaches (primarily assigned to work with teachers), 4 student teachers assigned to cooperating teachers at the school, and 3 administrators. The participants represented a wide range of experience ranging from one to more than 30 years of teaching experience. Table 1 provides information about each participant, including their assignment at Brazos Elementary and number of years of experience. The letter (B) in parenthesis indicates that the participant held bilingual Spanish/English certification and the letter (E) indicates the participant held ESL certification. An * by a participant's name means they were identified as a focus participant.

Table 1: Chart of participant information

Participant	Assignment at Brazos Elementary	Years of Teaching Experience	Number of Classroom Observations	Number of Meeting Observations	Number of Interviews
Lucia	Principal (B)	17	NA	6	2
Kayla	Assistant Principal (B)	12	NA	6	1
Maria	Assistant Principal (B)	23	NA	6	1
Gina*	Literacy Coach	9	5	21	4
Stella	Science Coach	28	0	9	2
Héctor	Math Coach (B)	10	0	6	2
Elena	Reading Specialist (B)	31	1	4	2
Whitney^	Reading Specialist	11	0	2	1
Sharon	Pre-Kindergarten	26	2	0	1
Isabella^	Pre-Kindergarten (B)	11	0	0	1
Jason	Pre-Kindergarten	12	2	0	2
Cathy	Kindergarten	6	2	1	2
Karen	Kindergarten	12	5	1	3
Lydia	1st Grade (B)	38	1	1	1
Helen*	1st Grade (E)	39	15	1	3
David^	1st Grade (B)	5	0	1	2
Rachel*	2nd Grade	3	14	3	2
Valerie	2nd Grade	14	5	2	2

Table 1 (Continued)

Paula	3rd Grade (B)	18	3	3	2
Arturo*	3rd Grade (B)	5	10	4	3
Celestina	3rd Grade (B)	6	4	4	2
Evelyn	3rd Grade (E)	3	3	3	2
Sasha	4th Grade (B)	3	3	4	3
Leah	4th Grade (E)	6	4	4	2
June	4th Grade (B)	3	5	4	3
Rory*	4th Grade (E)	2	9	4	4
Nicki	4th Grade	10	3	4	2
Russell	5th Grade	8	1	2	1
Lori	5th Grade (B)	5	1	1	0
Caitlyn	5th Grade	1	3	2	2
Erin	5th Grade	3	2	3	1
Carl	5th Grade (B)	3	1	2	1
Rolando	5th Grade (B)	25	3	2	1
Connie	Special Education Inclusion, 3rd and 4th Grades	25	0	2	1
Norah	Life Skills	6	3	0	2
Lane^	Life Skills	5	0	0	1
Brisa	Student Teacher- 5th Grade with Russell	0	4	2	1

Table 1 (Continued)

Frankie	Student Teacher- 4th Grade with June	0	4	3	1
Sally	Student Teacher- 4th Grade with Evelyn	0	4	3	1
Josie	Student Teacher- 4th Grade with Leah	0	4	3	1

When participants signed the consent form, they agreed to being interviewed once in the beginning of the school year and once at the end. They also consented to being observed in their classroom and during meetings. There were a few participants who wanted to contribute only through interviews and observations of meetings, and not through classroom observations. These participants are denoted with ^.

After three months of data collection, I identified five focus participants. One criterion for choosing focus teachers was their willingness to participate as a focus participant, which meant an increase in the number of classroom observations plus an additional interview mid-year. Other parameters used to identify focus teachers sought to maximize variation among them. Because I was going to spend more time in their classrooms, it was important to me to find teachers who were different from each other, and factors I took into account included number of years of experience, grade level, the types of literacy events in their classroom, experiences with professional development, and revealing information from interviews and observations about the sources of influence on their teaching of reading and writing. The participants I selected as focus teachers included Gina (the literacy coach), Helen (a 1st grade teacher), Rachel (a 2nd

grade teacher), Arturo (a 3rd grade bilingual teacher), and Rory (a 4th grade teacher). I chose the four classroom teachers because of the range of experiences they had in terms of grade levels and the variation in literacy events I observed in their classrooms.

Helen had the most teaching experience with 39 years of service, primarily in Kindergarten and 1st grade in other states. This was her fifth year at Brazos Elementary. Her literacy teaching included components such as guided reading (when she met with a small group of students to read a text on students' instructional level) and literacy centers (when students rotated in small groups through different literacy activities such as using the classroom library, playing a word game, or using a computer program). She was also trying out Writing Workshop for the first time in her class. Most of her teaching materials (including books, charts, and student worksheets) and lesson plans came from the textbook adoption.

Rachel had three years of experience, all at Brazos Elementary. She mainly used a combination of whole group and individual instruction to teach reading and writing through a workshop approach. Other components of her literacy instruction that she used on a daily basis consisted of reading aloud to her students and going over weekly spelling words that students were tested on each Friday. Most of Rachel's read aloud selections were based on weekly author studies in which she selected books written by the same author. Rachel deliberately resisted using guided reading as an approach to teaching because of a strong dislike for the way students were organized into groups and the structure of rotating groups in and out of meeting with the teacher.

Arturo had five years of experience at Brazos Elementary and was the only

bilingual focus teacher. He was also the only teacher in the school who also lived in the neighborhood. A native of Mexico, Arturo taught high school there for several years before deciding to immigrate to the United States and pursue a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Arturo first taught Kindergarten at Brazos Elementary before asking Lucia, the principal, if he could move up to 3rd grade. After hearing about the pressure of getting Mexican students to pass the state tests, Arturo wanted to see if he could make a difference in a testing grade. His literacy instruction mainly consisted of whole group and small group instruction. He often had students work individually to complete literacy tasks, such as reading and writing independently. He used a combination of picture books for read alouds, commercial reading materials for students (e.g., *Time for Kids*), and test preparation materials.

Rory had the fewest years of experience with two years of teaching experience, all at Brazos Elementary. Her literacy teaching was comprised of Reading and Writing Workshop in which she relied heavily on conferring with individual students. She also used whole and small group instruction on a daily basis for teaching. She posted lots of charts up in the classroom that she co-constructed with her students that contained information about procedures (e.g., how to use a writer's notebook) as well as concepts (e.g., how to make an inference while reading).

Gina, the literacy coach, was selected because of the role she played in shaping and making decisions about literacy teaching practices. She had nine years of teaching experience as well as advanced certifications in literacy. She had a master's degree in literacy instruction and was National Board certified. She was able to influence literacy

instruction by meeting with teachers to plan, modeling for teachers in their classrooms, co-teaching with teachers in their classrooms, meeting with administrators to discuss school plans, meeting with reading specialists to make plans for working with students, and by working with students in small groups for test preparation.

Just as other ethnographers have demonstrated the use of informants, these focus participants also served as informants as I was able to develop a more intimate relationship with them because of the amount of time I spent observing them and talking to them. Once these participants were identified, I asked them to complete a new consent form that acknowledged their participation as a focus participant. One teacher was asked to be a focus participant, but declined participation, while still agreeing to continue in the study.

Reason for Choosing Brazos Elementary

I chose Brazos Elementary School in Austin, Texas for several reasons. First, I was drawn to the school because it is very similar to the school where I taught for six years in Austin as a bilingual Spanish/English teacher in terms of demographics, location, historically low test scores, high teacher turn over, and socioeconomic status of students. Second, I was drawn to the school's history and demographic information. The school resides in the largest Latino community in the city. As a teacher and researcher, I am familiar with working with Latino communities in the Austin area and I speak Spanish fluently. I feel a strong commitment to working in Latino communities with the hopes of moving towards more equitable conditions and outcomes for Latino students. Third, Brazos Elementary appealed to me because of my involvement with the school in various

capacities that were related to the forming of a partnership between the university and the school. This partnership began in January of 2010 as two professors from the university established a classroom space at Brazos Elementary for their undergraduate classes in which preservice teachers also tutored elementary students during the day and their parents in the evening as part of a field based experience. Gina, the literacy coach, was a former undergraduate and master's level student at the university who studied with the professors who taught at the school. She helped make the move to Brazos Elementary possible by coordinating with her principal and the professors. My involvement included facilitating the student teaching experience of the four student teachers who were placed at the school. This included observing and providing feedback on lessons they taught as well as meeting regularly with them and their cooperating teachers to discuss their progress and goals. Another way I was involved with the school community included being the teaching assistant for a community literacy course that involved overseeing an adult literacy class in the evenings in which preservice teachers taught the parents of children at Brazos Elementary.

I also had multiple interactions with teachers at the school that included professional development. In the summer of 2010, I was involved in two forms of professional development offered on the school campus. During the first professional development I worked as the teaching assistant for a reading institute in which district teachers, including staff from Brazos Elementary, learned about assessment and the teaching of reading while also tutoring students each day for four weeks. The second professional development was a weeklong institute focused on the teaching of writing in

which I worked with a group of teachers only from Brazos Elementary. A third way I interacted with teachers from the school related to a social justice inquiry group I helped coordinate. This group met once a month and included teachers from the Austin area, including some teachers from Brazos Elementary.

Another reason I chose Brazos Elementary and why I believe it was the right school for this study is because of the number of changes that had occurred there prior to data collection. In addition to the changes related to the university partnership, the school was in the process of experiencing more stability than it had historically. After high principal turnover, the principal, Lucia, was about to begin her third year as the school leader. This was also the first time the school experienced low teacher turn over with only one classroom teacher and one support specialist being hired for the 2010-2011 school year, a shift from the 20 new staff members Lucia had to hire her first year. Also, although the school struggled with obtaining acceptable test scores on the state test in the past, the improvements and gains they made the previous year were enough to obtain "recognized" status from the state board. This suggested there were a substantial number of positive changes going on that I wanted to examine more closely in terms of what the teachers and school did to make improvements.

Data Sources and Data Collection

The research design was qualitative and occurred during the 2010-2011 school year from August to April. Using ethnographic research methods such as prolonged engagement, participant observation, field notes, and interviews (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Glesne, 2006), I explored the literacy teaching practices of teachers at

Brazos Elementary School. Data sources included field notes from classroom observations and observations of meetings between staff members such as faculty meetings and grade level meetings, expanded field notes, video recordings, transcripts of semi-formal interviews with staff members and students of focus teachers, field notes from informal conversations with staff members, photographs of classrooms and materials, and documents such as photocopies of lesson plans and papers passed out during class. During classroom observations, I focused on literacy instruction and events. I defined these events as "observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context" (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). The kinds of events I focused on included the teacher reading aloud to students; the teacher conferring with individual students about their independent reading; the teacher working with a small group of students on reading; groups of students talking to each other about reading or writing; the teacher teaching a whole group lesson about writing; the teacher conferring with individual students about their writing; and whole group lessons about reading such as word study.

Participant observation.

Through participant observation I immersed myself in the daily life of the school (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) in order to help answer my questions about how reform efforts intersected with literacy teaching practices and how teachers responded. Field notes and video recordings were the data I used to capture the day-to-day experiences of the classroom as well as casual conversations with staff members. I observed in

classrooms by creating a schedule with teachers who consented to participate. These schedules helped me to coordinate times and days when I entered classrooms. Depending on my schedule and the participant's schedules, the time I spent in classrooms varied each week and ranged between 0 hours and 22 hours each week. Each classroom observation was between 30 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes. In addition, I observed and took field notes of other school activities related to literacy and the teaching of literacy such as faculty meetings, grade level meetings, meetings with the literacy coach, and professional development sessions. The literacy coach and administrative personnel offered some of the professional development sessions and there were days when some teachers attended professional development at a local university about the teaching of writing. The field notes collected from these meetings and professional development sessions helped me answer my questions related to how staff members talked about literacy and literacy instruction, sources of influence, and power and social relationships. These meetings ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. Table 2 shows the number of classroom observations, observations of meetings, and interviews I conducted each month.

Table 2: Chart of observations and interviews

Month	Total number of classroom observations	Total number of observations of meetings	Number of Interviews
August	14	0	0
September	12	5	11
October	18	7	8
November	4	5	0
December	10	4	14
January	18	8	2
February	22	3	4
March	12	2	1
April	0	1	26
Totals	110	35	66

In terms of my role along the participant-observer continuum (Glesne, 2006), I allowed my role to be flexible. Most of the time I participated as a participant observer (Swann, 1993) with a focus on writing field notes. I acknowledge that by merely being present and watching, I acted as a participant and my presence likely had an affect on the interactions (Labov, 1972). In terms of interacting with students, with the exception of one class, I practiced restraint in terms of instructing them or answering their questions as I did not want to interfere with the classroom activities. The classroom in which I did offer some instruction and had the most interaction with students was in Helen's 1st grade class. Helen was one of the teachers who attended my professional development on writing during the summer and asked if I would model writing workshop mini-lessons and conferences in her class.

Interviews.

While observations provided much in the way of description and understanding, there was a need to consider the perspective of the insiders as well. For each teacher there is a different understanding of what happens in the school. Because of this, interviews in addition to observations provided a way of gaining insight to the experiences and perceptions of individuals—producing a narrative for interpretation.

I interviewed most participants at least twice during the school year at the time and location of their choosing. I interviewed them once in the fall semester and once in the spring semester. For the teachers who were chosen as focus teachers, I interviewed them an additional time during the middle of the semester for a total of three interviews (with the exception of Gina who I interviewed a total of four times). Throughout chapters 4-6, these interviews are indicated as data sources with "First Interview" referring to the interview that occurred during the fall semester, "Final Interview" indicating the interview that occurred in the spring semester. The interviews that occurred during the middle of the year are indicated as "Mid-year Interview." These semi-formal interviews lasted approximately one hour. As noted in Table 1, there were some teachers with whom I only conducted one interview. Ideally I would have conducted two interviews with everyone, but sometimes this was a difficult task due to scheduling issues.

All interviews were semi-formal (Weiss, 1994) and were video or audio recorded. Each interview was guided by a standard set of questions that focused on asking each participant about his/her teaching of literacy or understanding of literacy (See Appendix A for interview protocols). I tried to create a conversation during the interview rather

than a question-answer structure that tended to position the participant as a passive provider of answers. I used the list of questions as a guide and reference rather than as a checklist that needed to be completed. The overall goal of these semi-formal interviews was to seek understanding from each participant's point of view and to contribute to the data I collected through observations. The questions I asked teachers related to their teaching of literacy, the decisions they made, the sources of influence on their teaching, and I asked questions about their background such as number of years of teaching and the college they attended.

Informal conversations.

In addition to scheduled interviews, I interacted with participants through informal conversations. These were the bits of conversation that occurred spontaneously such as passing in the hallway or eating lunch in the teachers' lounge. Because I spent many hours at Brazos Elementary, I had many informal conversations with staff members as a way of being a part of the daily life of the school. I wrote notes about these informal conversations after they occurred if they related to my inquiry about literacy teaching practices and beliefs. I wrote these notes in a word document on my laptop and saved them in a folder along with my field notes for each individual staff member. For conversations that were not of this topic or that occurred with staff members who do not consent to participate, I did not make note of them.

Field notes.

In addition to participant observations, interviews, and informal conversations, field notes were my primary source of data collection. The process of observing, sitting

down, and then turning into writing a piece of a lived experience is the backbone of ethnographic research (Emerson et al., 1995). The accumulation of these written records of observations and experiences provides a means through which the researcher begins to interpret the lives and experiences of those who live in a setting. Field notes help preserve an experience close to the moment in which it occurs and can be used to deepen reflection and understanding. They are the researcher's accounts of participants' meanings and experiences. Field notes help serve the goal of moving beyond description to interpretation.

Because field notes provide a rich and distinctive resource for the ethnographer to preserve an experience, it is necessary that they be created as close as possible to the moment of occurrence that is being captured (Heath et al., 2008). I wrote field notes while I observed in classrooms or meetings using my laptop computer. When I had informal conversations with teachers, I recorded my field notes onto my laptop computer just after they occurred. During interviews, I wrote notes in a spiral notebook so my typing and the computer did not interfere with the interview.

After each observation and interview I expanded my field notes on the same day and as close to the event as possible. This occurred on-site at the school in a location such as the hallway just outside the classroom I observed in or in the portable space for university classes if it was unoccupied. The time devoted to expanding field notes was an essential, concentrated time for writing, recalling, and making sense of experiences. The amount time I spent expanding field notes was be about one hour for each hour spent in the field.

My field notes contained a standard heading that consisted of the date, time, activities observed, label of video recording if used, and any artifacts I collected. The information I recorded included information about the setting, such as the floor plan and location in the school, as well as information about the key events and activities going on. I used my spiral notebook to sketch maps of the physical arrangement of classrooms as a part of collecting information about the setting. Other information I put into my field notes included anecdotal notes, details about the actions of participants, and descriptions of the interactions between teachers and students. Capturing the speech of teachers and students was an important part of taking field notes. I italicized words that were captured verbatim to set them apart from the parts of speech that I paraphrased. I frequently returned to my research questions as a way of guiding my observations and the kinds of information I captured in my field notes.

The format I used to write my field notes was similar to what Swann (1993) describes as dividing the field notes between "notes" and "comments/questions." I created a chart with two columns. I labeled the left hand side "Note Taking" and the right hand side "Note Making." Notes that were descriptive and objective about what I observed went in the "Note Taking" section. This section is similar to what Corsaro (1981) calls field notes, and are events experienced through watching and listening with as little interpretation as possible. The other column labeled "Note Making" was for what Corsaro termed personal notes, methodological notes, and theoretical notes. Descriptive and objective notes included information such as the lesson taught, materials used, and words used by the teacher. Personal thoughts included my feelings and opinions while

methodological notes included technical information such as noting that the class was in the computer lab and therefore I could not observe an entire lesson. Theoretical notes related to patterns and ideas I had about theories that seemed to be emerging.

Video and audio recordings.

I used video and audio recordings as a way of capturing and creating a permanent record of classroom observations, meetings, and interviews with staff member in addition to my field notes. I primarily used audio recordings, as I found this method to be less obtrusive. I used a systematic way of labeling each recording that included the date and person or event observed (e.g.,*08/10/10_faculty meeting* or *08/10/10_Garza class*). I also maintained a word document that listed each recording by label with more information such as a description of the event recorded (e.g., *This is an hour long recording of Mrs. Garza's 1st grade bilingual class. She was teaching guided reading to two groups for 30 minutes each.*)

While I observed in classrooms of all the teachers who consented to participate, I only video or audio recorded in the classrooms of teachers who I identified as focus teachers. The reason for this had to do with student permissions. If a teacher was a focus teacher, I asked him/her to explain the study to his/her students and send home parental consent forms. Students were given the option to decline participation by being placed outside of the frame of the camera or outside of the parameters of what the audio recorder could pick up. If a student who declined participation accidentally entered into the frame of the camera or had his/her voice recorded, I did not enter his/her information into the transcript.

Transcripts of video/audio recordings.

I transcribed all interviews and selectively chose video/audio recordings of classroom observations and meetings to transcribe for data analysis. To assist in my decision of what to transcribe verbatim, I reviewed each video/audio recording multiple times to decide which recordings were most helpful in illustrating the data I was focusing on.

While transcripts may serve as a permanent and convenient record of observations, they are also limiting. They are only partial representations, and the written text itself serves as a kind of interpretation made by the transcriber (Ochs, 1999; Swann, 1993). For this reason, I incorporated other data sources into my study. Another aspect of creating transcripts relates to the format and the affordances of each. The format I used for transcripts is what Swann (1993) calls a "standard" layout. This layout resembles the dialogue in a play in which speaking turns follow one another in sequence and the focus is only on verbal behavior. In addition, this layout allows for an extra column used to write comments.

Photography.

Photographs provided an additional form of data. Photography, like video recording, was a way of capturing and creating a permanent record that could be returned to repeatedly. Photographs created still images and were useful for documenting things like classroom arrangements and visuals like teacher created charts and student work displayed on the wall. I used photographs in addition to my field notes to help document classrooms. I took photographs of all the classrooms I observed with the teacher's

permission. These photographs helped me remember classrooms and added another layer of description to my field notes. I collected more than 1,000 photographs in all.

Positionality

Although the primary goal of an ethnographic study is to immerse oneself in the daily life and experiences of a group of people, I acknowledge that immersion does not equate becoming an insider. As much as I may have had in common with the staff members at Brazos Elementary (having taught at a similar school in the same city for six years), I know that I was primarily viewed as a researcher pursuing research interests. My position as the researcher is important to acknowledge and explain. Ethnographers objectify other people's realities and creating representations of other people is fraught with problems. Additionally, "the researcher is a perceptual lens through which observations are made and interpreted, so the researcher profoundly affects what can be understood" (McCutcheon, 1982). I took on this study with the understanding and underlying assumption that no one can speak from a neutral point of view. While I tried to remain objective in many ways through data collection and the writing of my findings, there were a multitude of factors that compromised this—social class, gender, age, personal experiences, etc.

The staff members at Brazos Elementary were commonly subjected to having outsiders in their classrooms who observed their instruction and inspected their students' work. These "outsiders" included district personnel who conducted frequent visits through classrooms, particularly in 3rd-5th grades where high-stakes testing occurred, to ensure instruction was in line with the state standards, the TEKS. I hoped that my

presence was distinguished from those with a supervisory role and not interpreted as another watchful eye or "spy" for the district or principal. Because I was associated with the university as a doctoral student, teaching assistant, and facilitator for interns, and because I led a weeklong professional development on the teaching of writing for teachers before the school year began, I did not want teachers to feel as if I was "checking" on them. By only observing in the classrooms of teachers who consented to participate, I hoped to address some of these issues. Another way I addressed this issue was by indicating in the teacher consent forms that any information or data I collected would be kept confidential.

One aspect of my position as a researcher that I had to think carefully about was providing feedback to teachers about their teaching. Because my priority was researcher, I refrained from providing feedback, even when some teachers asked me for my thoughts on their teaching.

Finally I would like to acknowledge that because of my background as a former bilingual Spanish/English teacher in the same school district at a similar school, I entered this site already knowing much about how schools like Brazos Elementary function and what to expect. While this may have be a strength in some ways and helped me feel comfortable being at Brazos Elementary, it may also mean I held some preconceived expectations or assumptions, such as my belief that there were positive changes occurring at the school. As I collected and analyzed data I had to constantly be aware of this lens in order to seek to understand the setting, learn from the participants, and question my own

assumptions and perceptions, rather than impose my own ideas on the situation based on my past experiences (Hymes, 1982).

Stages of Data Collection

There were three stages to my data collection. In the first stage, which occurred between August and September, I primarily concern myself with obtaining permissions from staff members to participate and establish my presence in the school. During this time I began conducting interviews and observing in classrooms and meetings. The second stage was the longest and occurred from October to March. During this time I finished first interviews with staff members; observed in classrooms; observed staff meetings concerning literacy; identified focus teachers; and conducted mid-year interviews with focus teachers. The third stage occurred in April and was the final stage of data collection. During this time my focus was on conducting all final interviews. (See Table 3 for a description of all research tasks during Stages I, II, and III).

Stage I.

During the first stage I obtained permissions from staff members and established my presence in the school. One way I established my presence was by teaching a weeklong writing institute (professional development) from August 9-13 at the school in which 12 teachers from across all grade levels attended. This writing institute focused on writing as process, composing as thinking, and writing workshop as a classroom structure. During this time teachers spent part of their time planning for the school year, including plans for the physical arrangement of their classrooms to allow for a workshop structure.

Another way I have established my presence in the school occurred the week following the writing institute when all staff members returned from summer break and began planning for the coming school year. I coordinated with the principal to be introduced at a meeting when all staff members were present so they would know who I am and be able to recognize me. I used this time to explain my research goals, including my research questions, and ask teachers to complete consent forms.

During this first stage I spent time in classrooms during the literacy block to initially observe how teachers spent the first few weeks getting their classrooms going. This was an important time to observe how teachers talked about reading and writing with their students, what they did to establish routines that allowed for the teaching of reading and writing, and how they assessed students' reading and writing. This part of data collection helped establish my presence by getting the students, as well as teachers, used to me being in the classrooms.

Stage II.

Stage II was the longest stage and occurred between October and March. In October I finished all of my first interviews and continued observing in classrooms and meetings. Based on the data I collected during Stage I, I revised my research questions using open coding of my field notes and from identifying themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In November I identified five focus teachers and had them complete a new consent form that allowed me to conduct an additional interview in December and to video/audio record in their classrooms. After identifying these focus teachers, I focused

on observing in their classrooms the most, but continued to observe meetings and in other classrooms.

Each month I reviewed my data and wrote analytic memos that included my thoughts about what I was finding as well as patterns and emerging themes. These analytic memos were typed into a word document that served as a summary of each month's findings and helped me make sense of the data.

Stage III.

Stage III occurred in April. At this time, I conducted my final interviews and conduced some classroom and meeting observations. One goal of these final interviews was to have staff members reflect on the school year and talk about how their literacy teaching changed over the school year. These interviews also served as a way of member checking. I shared my interpretations with staff members about the data I collected over the school year and asked them to verify, contest, comment on, etc. my interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 3. Timeline for research tasks and data analysis

Month		Research Task	Data Analysis
August	Stage I	• Established presence in the school • Obtained informed consent from staff members • Created a schedule for observations and interviews with participants • Observations of teachers (without video recording) • Observations of staff and grade level meetings (without video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data
September		• Initial interviews with staff members (with video recording) • Observations of teachers (without video recording)	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data

		• Observations of staff and grade level meetings (with video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	

Table 3 (Continued)

October	Stage II	• Observations of teachers (without video recording) • Observations of staff and grade level meetings (with video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data • Revised research questions
November		• Identified 5 focus teachers who signed a new informed consent form • Continued with observations of focus and non-focus teachers (video recording only for focus teachers) • Observations of staff and grade level meetings (with video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data
December	Stage III	• Continued with observations of focus and non-focus teachers (video recording only for focus teachers) • Mid-year interview with focus teachers (with video recording) • Observations of staff and grade level meetings (with video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data •
January February March		• Continued with observations of focus and non-focus teachers (video recording only for focus teachers) • Observations of staff and grade level meetings (with video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data •
April May		• Continued with observations of focus and non-focus teachers (video recording only for focus teachers) • Final interviews with staff members and focus teachers (with video recording) • Observations of staff and grade level meetings (with video recording) • Wrote and expand field notes	• Ongoing analysis and organization of data • Member checking

Data Analysis

Constant-comparative method.

Data analysis was inductive and ongoing. I used the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a way of deriving theory that was grounded in the data. This method of data analysis allows the researcher to constantly interact with the data by asking questions and making comparisons that lead to the development of theory connected to the data. The constant-comparative method is useful as a tool for analyzing data, as it is an effort to build theory, rather than test theory. In this sense, theory emerges from the data as theoretical and systematic coding procedures help conceptualize larger themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I began data analysis as soon as I began collecting data in August. Throughout data collection, I read and reread my field notes and interview transcripts on a weekly basis while using open coding to develop initial categories and theoretical hypotheses, and to refine or revise my categories and theoretical hypotheses. In addition to using new data to confirm existing categories, I also looked for examples of negative cases to further refine developing hypotheses. In May, once I was finished with all data collection, I used the codes and categories developed from during data collection to reduce and reorganize the data according to major analytical categories.

Through this highly reflexive process, I read line-by-line in order to name and categorize the phenomena. I printed all field notes and transcripts and then organized

them by participants' names or events such as grade level planning meetings in three-ring binders. Initially I began by handwriting my notes and ideas directly on printouts of the field notes and transcripts. After a month of generating open-codes in this way, I imported all of my data into ATLAS.ti, a computer software program designed for conducting qualitative research. At this time I recreated my handwritten notes in ATLAS.ti and then continued to code the rest of the data using the software program. Sometimes these codes were single words such as "interventions" or "assessments," and sometimes they were phrases such as "breaking the text up into smaller chunks is a strategy for reading" or "teacher models thinking about and planning her own story in front of students." At this level of coding, I chose language that explained what was occurring in the data, rather than imposing a pre-established set of codes onto the data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

While coding I also wrote memos about themes or categories I was noticing (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The following is an example of a memo I wrote about test preparation and how I saw it being used.

> Literacy teaching equates test preparation. Teachers are using materials that mirror tests passages and questions. They are teaching strategies for reading the passage and then answering the questions. To gear up for test taking, students take benchmark tests that are similar to the state tests. These tests give teachers a good indication of how a student might score on the actual test to be taken in April. This gives them time to teach students how to take and hopefully pass the test. Teachers and administrators are aware of other practices for teaching literacy--

> guided reading, reading aloud, workshops, word work--and some, more than others, make an effort to continue this kind of instruction but there is a place when test preparation takes over. Even for students who score high on their benchmark tests, test preparation is still an important part of their daily/weekly instruction. Teachers try to use materials that are more authentic than Xeroxed test passages. They use picture books, chapter books, and leveled books, but they pair these text choices with questions that are like the questions asked on the test. (Memo, 08/26/11)

The initial process of coding the entire data set generated more than 200 codes. I printed out all of my codes, cut each one out individually with scissors, and arranged them by hand on large sheets of butcher paper with tape based on similarities. I assigned each group a categorical name with a sticky note to characterize the codes. Examples of these categories include: struggles and tension, instructional decisions, materials for teaching, and talking as part of literacy teaching. Appendix B provides a list of all 73 categories created at this time.

The grouping of the initial codes into categories helped to create more meaningful units that I later refined and recoded to develop categories and themes. Once I created this initial set of categories, I wrote a summary of my preliminary findings accompanied by a table with quotes from field notes and interview transcripts that supported the summary. Appendix C provides an example of what these preliminary findings looked like.

After creating these summaries and tables, I returned to my list of initial

categories to identify the ones that were 1) most salient in terms of describing the data and answering my research questions and/or 2) occurred with the most frequency. This resulted in a revised list of 43 categories, listed in Appendix B. When creating this revised list of categories, I combined and renamed some of the initial categories to support the answering of my research questions. For example, "literacy coach" was an initial category that was then revised to "Reform efforts: literacy coach." I made this change based on my questions about what reform efforts were in place at the school and as my understanding of the literacy coach's role developed to encompass her as a type of reform. The use of "Reform efforts" in front of her title also helped to organize and relate her role to other categories (e.g., Reform efforts: alignment, Reform efforts: reading specialists, Reform efforts: team planning).

My next step was to create a separate Word Document for each category to help me further develop it. I imported all quotes associated with the category from ATLAS.ti into a chart that allowed me to further sort and group them. This chart helped me understand each category better and helped me to develop theory based on the category. For example, the category of Test Preparation was broken down into nine descriptors:

1. Feelings about test preparation
2. Teaching how to take the test (preparing for test)
3. Understanding the test
4. Use of materials for test preparation
5. Time used to teach test preparation
6. Expectations about test preparation

7. Staffing to teach test preparation
8. Planning for test preparation based on student data
9. Grouping students for test preparation

These charts with the descriptors and quotes helped me later to develop each findings chapter, including the structure and subheadings. Appendix D provides one excerpt from a chart I created on Test Preparation. This excerpt shows a portion of the chart on "Feelings about test preparation." The entire chart was 114 pages, and is not included in this document.

Once I created a document for each category, I created another chart to help me organize and understand my categories. This chart contained a list of each category along with a description of the category. At this time, I reduced my categories down to 36 by eliminating those that seemed redundant or fit with other categories. Appendix E shows what this final chart looked like. The process of creating this chart helped me to begin to understand how the categories related to each other and served as the basis for constructing themes and also chapter headings and subheadings.

The following is an example of how I developed theory from initial codes and categories to construct the next chapter that examines how Brazos Elementary responded through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts. The three subheadings in this chapter reflect the theory I developed to answer this question. They are:

1. Unequal Distribution of Monetary Resources
2. Staff Members Used to Support Intermediate Grades
3. Differences Among Grade Levels in Attention Given to Bilingual Education

These subheadings were a result of refining, combining, and collapsing my open codes. Table 4 shows an example of how the development of these three subheadings came about, beginning with data from interview transcripts. The first column shows an example of data while the second column shows the initial codes I assigned to the corresponding data. The third column shows the category that the initial code was grouped with as I transitioned to creating categories out of open codes. The fourth column, "Revised Category," shows how the initial categories became revised and combined with other categories to develop categories that were more geared towards answering my research questions. The last column shows how the theory that the data became associated with—school organization—and the three subheadings that emerged, which also became the basis for the chapter's organization.

Table 4. Example of the development of theory from data, initial codes, and categories

Example of coded data	Initial Code(s)	Initial Category	Revised Category	Theory
The focus has really been on TAKS grades. First grade hasn't had reading specialists. I think administration understands that you can really help kids in earlier grades, but we are with limited resources. It's a resource issue. We've had to do it on our own. (David, First Interview)	Resources	School decisions	School organization: resources	School organization 1. Unequal distribution of monetary resources grades
Honestly, I don't feel supported in literacy. The ideal support would for a reading specialist to come and pull my low students or to meet during our team meetings to give us ideas on how to make our reading instruction better. (Cathy, Final Interview)	Support Reform efforts: reading specialists	Influence and support	School organization: lower versus upper grades	School organization 2. Staff members used to support intermediate grades

Table 4 (Continued)

If you are talking about what bilingual education should look like in 3rd grade here, who knows? If you go into our three different classes here, it's going to look different. Besides having everything coded in red and blue [English words written in red and Spanish words written in blue], I don't know. We know that at the beginning of the year if they are reading at a 24 [level used on the Developmental Reading Assessment] and depending on what their TELPAS [Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System] scores were from the last year, that's how we make our reading groups and then how we start deciding who tests in what language. That's the only overt time that it's like, okay this is what you have to follow, this is how you are going to know that these kids are reading in English or reading in Spanish and then at a mid-point looking at their benchmarks from the year. They're going to be testing in this language. Besides that time when we meet together for that, I don't know anything else. (Celestina, Final Interview)	Bilingual Education Language of instruction	Bilingual Education	Bilingual Education: lower versus upper grades	School organization 3. Differences among grade levels in attention given to bilingual education

Developing theory that was grounded in the data, from initial codes to the development of categories, helped me to interpret the data while answering my research questions and allowing findings to emerge from the data. In the above example, I illustrate how I came to answer the question of how Brazos Elementary responded through its school organization to the large-scale reform efforts. My process for

developing theory to answer my other research questions was similar in which codes and categories were developed and revised as well as related to each other.

Trustworthiness

I took measures to ensure trustworthiness in the careful design of this study. Some of the ways in which I did so included: spending an extended time in the field, triangulation of data collection methods and sources, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checking, clarification of my own biases and subjectivity, and using thick description to write up the findings. I spent an entire school year at Brazos Elementary in order to conduct prolonged and persistent observations. To ensure triangulation of my methods and data sources, I used interviews, field notes, video/audio recordings, documents, and transcripts. Having these multiple data sources was useful for finding patterns and themes in the data, but also helped me conduct a negative case analysis to find contradictory data as well. To incorporate peer debriefing into my study, I worked with a group of graduate students who were in a similar stage of the research process as myself in addition to working with my chairs and committee members. Member checking occurred during the third stage of data collection as a way of ensuring that my interpretations of the data were accurate. During the final interviews, I shared my understandings and emerging theories with staff members so they could provide clarification or verification.

CHAPTER 4: "IT'S MORE ABOUT THE TEST SCORES": SCHOOL ORGANIZATION IN RESPONSE TO HIGH-STAKES TESTING

Schools are social organizations full of complex relationships as well as structures, processes, and norms (Riehl, 2001) where different ideologies, purposes, and goals play out. Organizing these complex systems requires attention from whom to how and why decisions are made and how things get done. In some ways, a school is run democratically with participation from its members through meetings and committees. In other ways, schools reflect a hierarchical work organization with decisions made by only a select few in positions of power. The way control manifests in schools is often shifting and negotiated on a continual basis, with some schools gravitating towards one model more than others.

One of the most basic structural decisions about school organization comes down to solving four fundamental problems: how students are grouped, how teachers are assigned to groups, the amount of time allotted to content, and how student progress is assessed. In the United States, the central solutions to address these matters have been attended to in ways that are somewhat "fixed" after years and years of "doing school" in these ways (Elmore, 1995). First, to address the problem of how to group students, two solutions have prevailed: one is to group students by grade level based on birth date, and the other is to group students by ability. These solutions then lend themselves to having teachers assigned to these groups (at the elementary level). To address the problem of time, the school day is broken into chunks of time that are to be allocated to content areas, with some areas given more prominence over others. In terms of assessment,

teachers are expected to assess students, with the expectation that assessments and student progress be summarized periodically through grades. In addition, external assessments (e.g., high-stakes tests) provide another layer of assessment for monitoring and comparing student progress. The regularity with which schools are organized makes for consistency in terms of replicating school structures and serves as a common denominator of what to expect among teachers, administrators, students, parents, and the public (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996). These narrow and routinized solutions do not reflect the complexity or wide range of possible solutions, but help us to understand why schools, regardless of location or status, generally reflect the same set of answers about how to coordinate education on a mass scale.

Although the basic structure of schools remains largely unchanged, there is considerable variability in school systems with regard to how the smaller systems within them operate and interact (e.g., differences between classrooms, the ways resources are allocated) (Barr & Dreeben, 1991). These reflections in variability as well as changes made in schools are often in response to reform and tend to address teaching practices and curriculum. Schools have to be responsive to changes within the larger system of education, largely for reasons of survival in which teachers must make decisions related to compliance as part of their job security (Ball, 1987).

In this chapter, I drew on field notes of classroom and meeting observations and transcripts of interviews to address the question: *How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?* The codes and categories developed from the data set revealed the ways in which decisions about the organization

of the school were made to support high-stakes testing. These decisions reflected the ways in which the school interpreted the large-scale reform efforts created by NLCB. Anticipation of high-stakes testing and consequences of low performance, rather than the reform itself, spurred organizational decisions at Brazos Elementary that resulted in uneven attention and support for teachers and students.

While high-stakes testing was only intended for the intermediate grades (3rd-5th grades), an examination of the school's organization reveals how the entire school was influenced. Specifically, the three aspects of school organization that I focus on, and that occurred with most frequency in the data, include: school decisions about the allocation of monetary resources, the use of staff members to support teachers and students, and attention given to bilingual education. Decisions about all three of these aspects of the organization of the school reflected grade level differences, with intermediate grades receiving more support than primary grades. Second grade, being in the middle, was sometimes included with primary and sometimes with the intermediate grades. The decisions about where to place 2nd grade often reflected the time of the year, with 2nd grade receiving more support earlier on in the year and less support as the standardized testing dates drew nearer.

In this chapter I argue that the division the school organization created between grade levels due to testing is problematic because of how it perpetuates inequities in school where testing is privileged. I also argue that the imbalance in the way the school was organized distorted the schooling experience where early childhood experiences differed from intermediate grades experiences. First, by focusing resources and attention

on intermediate grades, students and teachers in the primary grades missed out on opportunities for development and support. With few monetary resources available to them, primary grades teachers were not given the same opportunities as the intermediate grades teachers such as offering student interventions outside of the regular school day, extending their own learning and understandings of literacy by attending professional development, and having additional time to devote to planning. The instructional team often questioned the literacy practices and planning decisions of the primary grades teachers, but did little to support their growth. The lack of attention given to these primary grades contributes to a cycle of taking attention away from where it is needed with the consequence of having to make up for it later. The question then comes of what the younger children are missing out on that could benefit their literacy development (immediately and in later years), and in what ways are their teachers' own growth and ability to promote early literacy development being underserved? This also raises concerns about the implications of not being concerned with the quality of teaching and learning in the primary grades and creates a self-defeating scenario in which emphasis is placed on testing once students reach the 3rd grade, but not sooner.

Secondly, the increased focus on testing for students in 3rd-5th grade meant resources were being used in a way that supported the narrowing of the curriculum that occurs when teaching practices are diminished to test preparation (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). Rather than use these resources in ways that promote meaningful literacy practices, they are used to maintain the status quo where a testing culture is advantaged, ultimately sending the message that testing is most important. The emphasis on testing

that students encounter once they are in 3rd grade distorts the schooling experience in which what appears to be the "advantaged" side—receiving support in the form of resources and staffing—is actually a different kind of disadvantage from not receiving those supports earlier on.

The differences in support offered to grade levels reflected a hierarchical work organization where decisions were made by a select few, the instructional team, based on meeting the immediate needs of the campus as determined by testing. Consequently, the result was what the principal referred to as two schools: "a primary school and an intermediate school" (Lucia, Final Interview). The division in the school by primary and intermediate grades was acknowledged and felt by teachers and administration. "I'm trying to be more in the primary this year than I've ever been before because that's always hard. Our attention's always in intermediate and we know the work needs to happen in primary too" (Lucia, Final Interview). Lucia's quote illustrates that these decisions were made in spite of knowing what is best for the students and school.

Just as Lucia's comment suggests there was conflict between knowing what should be done and what was actually done, the instructional team made organizational decisions based on grade levels and testing. Teacher's interpretations of these decisions reflected their understanding of an imbalance between grade levels. Karen, a Kindergarten teacher, was particularly bothered by her perception of the split between grade levels.

> Pre-K, Kinder, we usually get pushed under the rug towards the end of the year. They [administration] don't really come to see if we are doing our rigor still. They

> don't come to see if we're doing anything to keep up with the TAKS scores. It's mostly about the TAKS grades. (Karen, Final Interview)

Karen's statement reflects her dissatisfaction with the difference in grade levels, especially in the spring semester when test preparation begins. In this same interview, Karen discussed how she felt undervalued because she did not work with students in the testing grades.

> But being on that committee [Language Arts committee] and hearing the upper grades say, 'I'm a TAKS grade, I come up here on weekend and I have to do reading camps and math camps and I have to tutor and I have to be ready and I have to actually administer the TAKS test, I should get more money.' To sit there and say you mean nothing, your teaching means nothing because you're just a Kindergarten teacher. But what they didn't realize is if that kindergartner didn't meet the goals, that's probably one of the kids that you're struggling with. (Karen, Final Interview)

Karen's strong view illustrates the importance she placed on supporting students in the primary grades and the questions she had about why there was such a lack of support. She was also bothered by the perception of 3rd-5th grade teachers that only the teachers in the testing grades were doing the hard work and their teaching was more important.

Other teachers also acknowledged the division in grade levels, including the lack of communication between grade levels. Celestina, a 3rd grade bilingual teacher, and Leah, a 4th grade teacher, both talked about their firsthand experience with the difference in grade levels.

> I still don't know half the people in PreK-K. We have different worlds. Sort of a problem. The teachers from 3rd-5th are getting better and we are communicating more with each other. I follow my kids up to 5th and ask teachers how they are doing and what they are learning. I feel like there's a lot of open communication with them. (Celestina, First Interview)

As the intermediate grades found solidarity under the guise of being the "testing grades," teachers' communication increased to inquire about student progress, but did little for increasing communication with the primary grade teachers.

> I think it's very split between the lower grades and the upper grades. When I was in 2nd grade I had no knowledge of 3rd and 4th grade. I had no knowledge of what a TAKS score was. I knew what TAKS was but I had no knowledge of the pressures. It's sad to say it, and I think this is where we get our funding and state recognition, but I really think for admin, success is based on the test score. I don't believe that to be what we should base it on, but I know we have to make a certain score. (Leah, Final Interview)

Leah's comment reflects the reality of having to prepare students for the state tests, and doing what was necessary to provide support for students and teachers in those grade levels, even if that meant perpetuating the division in grade levels.

The next three sections provide evidence of the ways that teachers interpreted and understood the organizational decisions made by the instructional team to organize the school with testing given a priority. Across all data sources, teachers felt strongly that the school was divided unequally. The first two sections address the unequal distribution of

monetary resources and staff members. These two themes were salient and occurred frequently in the data, often as a source of conflict. The last section identifies bilingual education as another area of school organization that was affected by an emphasis on testing. While this theme did not occur with as much frequency as the first two, I included it in this chapter to show how an area of school organization that is largely ignored was enhanced because of testing. Bilingual teachers expressed their disagreement with the ways in which decisions about bilingual education were made only because of testing.

Unequal Distribution of Monetary Resources

In terms of funding, most of the monetary resources were allocated to the intermediate grades. This form of support was provided in three main ways: by providing money for student interventions, professional development, and extra planning time.

Student interventions.

The school received large sums of money from Title I funds that the instructional team then decided to use to provide interventions for students in need of support with test preparation (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 12/06/10). Interventions came in a variety of formats, which ranged from during school hours, after school, on Saturdays, and during lunch hours. The money used for interventions provided stipends for classroom teachers and other support staff to work the extra hours, paid for the hiring of new support staff to work with students during the day, and also paid for materials and snacks for students. Interventions were only made available to students in 3rd-5th grades.

Professional development.

Professional development was another way money was used to support teachers. For Lucia, it was important that the school view professional development as something for everyone, including administrators and coaches, to learn and benefit from, not just classroom teachers (Lucia, First Interview). Despite this view, the majority of teachers who were supported to attend professional development were intermediate grades teachers. The money used for professional development included the cost of the professional development (if a fee was charged) and the cost to cover substitute teachers.

Most of the professional development during the school year was offered at the school level rather than at the district level. In addition to teachers generally not finding professional development offered at the district level helpful, there was also considerably less professional development offered by the district than in years past due to budget cuts. The few opportunities for professional development offered by the district related to test preparation and how to use materials or teach test-taking strategies. Most of the professional development offered at the school level came from the literacy coach in the form of book studies, summer school, and workshops.

In addition to providing professional development opportunities on-campus, teachers were also able to attend professional development at the university. During the fall semester, some teachers attended three workshops provided by the university's writing project. One focused on the use of mini-lessons during writing workshop, another focused on the role of talk and discourse in teaching, and the other was about using poetry with students in the primary grades. Information about professional development

at the university usually came from Gina, by way of myself, or by professors at the university who knew her. Because of a partnership created between the school and the university, teachers were invited to attend free of cost, with the only cost to the school being the provision of substitute teachers. Second through 5th grade teachers attended the first two workshops while Helen, a 1st grade teacher, was the only one who attended the third workshop (the workshop was focused on teaching in the primary grades). Although the school provided substitute teachers for teachers for the first two workshops, Helen had to take a personal day in order to attend the workshop, despite asking the school to provide her with a substitute teacher.

Money was also provided to pay for five teachers to attend the annual meeting of the International Reading Association at the end of the school year. Money was allocated to pay for substitute teachers, conference fees, airfare, and lodging. The teachers invited to attend this conference were all in intermediate grades, with the exception of Rachel, a 2nd grade teacher who was going to be teaching 3rd grade the following year. They were invited to attend the conference based on their voluntary participation in teaching summer school, a special program created at the school level to provide professional development for teachers and interventions for students.

Planning time.

Teachers were expected to plan as a team on a weekly basis and they were well aware of this expectation. June, a 4th grade bilingual teacher, described this expectation as such:

> We always plan together, and that's an expectation that is very apparent, and it's not forced like documented. But it's an expectation that we're all very aware of so everyone's expected to come. We usually have coaches that are leading us in what, we know what's coming up and we bring our materials and stuff, but the coaches act as the facilitators for the discussion and I don't know how because there's so many of us, teachers plus the inclusion teacher, that somehow we come up with a plan. (June, First Interview)

In addition to the expectation that teachers plan with their grade level teams on a weekly basis, money was allocated to provide intermediate grades teachers with extra planning time. These planning days occurred in December right before the winter break and during the spring semester before testing began. The focus of these meetings was to attend to class data from benchmark tests and plan for ways to support students. These "data days," as they were called, consisted of all teachers in the grade level as well as the literacy coach and administrators. One of the tasks they completed during this meeting involved making a list of all the students in a grade level whose score was less than 60% (Field Notes, Meeting, 12/10/10). This list provided a way of targeting students who would need intervention in order to increase their test scores. The information created was then used by the Gina to communicate with the reading specialists.

> Kayla [assistant principal] and I [Gina referring to herself] sorted each kid at grade level—lowest to highest and by language. They are the kids by district standards that need intervention. Eighty kids, won't get to all of them. We asked teachers to eliminate kids who probably won't need it because their score was just

> a fluke. We eliminated a few. Some of the 3rd graders who tested in English bombed, but won't need intervention in Spanish, they just aren't ready. Also on this list are kids you have been currently seeing but didn't qualify, but teachers want you to keep seeing them. There are also some new names and faces that we need you to support. (Field Notes, Meeting, 12/14/10)

This excerpt from a meeting with the reading specialists shows how students were identified to receive support from the reading specialists. With so many students qualifying, Gina asked teachers to take out the names of students whom they thought did not need interventions after all. She also acknowledged that some students might be testing in English for the first time and just need more time, but would probably do okay.

Lucia also proposed monetary solutions to the teachers' problem of not having enough time to plan. Teachers lost time to plan because after school interventions—tutoring students after the school day—took extra time. One suggestion Lucia offered was to ask teachers to stay later in order to plan and pay them for their time. Gina did not agree with Lucia's solution, however. Her response was that after school time is hard as teachers were exhausted by that time (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 12/06/10).

One of the purposes of team planning related to grade level alignment, a district expectation.

> The district has made a concentrated effort or push to horizontally and vertically align the curriculum with a lot of push-in help through coaches, reading specialists, and central office personnel that review the campus benchmark data and assist principals to plan for optimum results. (Maria, First Interview)

In this quote, Maria, one of the assistant principals, described the way support staff was expected to help with alignment, with the reminder that they were going to be monitored to ensure they were staying aligned with each other. Grade level alignment referred to teachers in the same grade level teaching the same skills and objectives from day to day and using the same assessments, given on the same days, although variation in the exact methods and materials teachers used to teach was permitted. Alignment between grade levels (vertical alignment), while acknowledged as important, received little to no attention, as the focus was within grade levels.

For intermediate grades, grade level alignment generally meant following the same pacing of skills and objectives so they would all be taught before the spring semester began so the time leading up to the TAKS test could be used to review and reteach the skills students were still struggling with. These grade levels were also expected to include structures for teaching reading and writing that allowed extended amounts of time for students to read and write independently while receiving support from teachers through conferences and mini-lessons, a workshop approach to teaching literacy (Gina, First Interview).

Teachers had materials available for planning, including state and district documents that outlined skills and ways to teach those skills. At the state level, the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) were the state's official curriculum for grades K-12. The TAKS test tested students' knowledge and understanding of these skills. Stella, the science coach and former literacy coach, explained:

> The state standards, not dictates, but tells us the level of rigor students are expected to know and be able to do. And so understanding those TEKS and student expectations really helps up to define and align curriculum and instruction and assessment. It helps us to align that and plan for instruction. The standards affect our teaching. So knowing the standards and knowing it well, that student expectation. And when I think standard I think student expectation first. It really does affect the way the think about planning and instruction and what the student is expected to know at that grade level. We look at alignment and how the curriculum spirals and where the students come from, where they need to be the following year. So we look across grade levels to see what the expectations are. That really drives our planning. (Stella, Final Interview)

This quote suggests a teacher's view of the importance of knowing the TEKS for planning and assessing students' knowledge.

Lucia also acknowledged the importance of using the TEKS as a starting point for planning. "They [teachers] have so many ideas but we've really looked at the state standards, the TEKS, to really make sure that we're hitting the mark and not just pulling all these nice activities and tricks and things to do that" (Lucia, First Interview). This quote reflects her belief and expectation for how teachers should plan in ways that stay close to the official document rather than planning "nice activities and tricks." For example, Lucia challenged the Kindergarten teachers' desire to develop their curricular plans in relation to topics like apples and pumpkins, units they were comfortable with,

but did not necessarily support the standards for Kindergarten skills (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 09/24/10).

Stella and Lucia's interpretations of using the TEKS to make curricular decisions suggests that the official documents provided by the state about what students are expected to know were important to how they understood the authority of those state standards. They viewed them as the official documents that determined what should be taught. This translated into the decisions they made as an instructional team about how to support and monitor teachers. They perceived their roles as a science coach and principal as supporting teachers to make curricular decisions based on following the TEKS and ensuring that was how teachers were arriving at those decisions. In turn, they organized themselves to provide such support by attending grade level meetings and meeting as an instructional team to discuss teaching in the school.

At the district level, the TEKS were interpreted in a document called the Curriculum Road Maps (CRMs). These were weekly instructional planning guides created at the district level which organized how TEKS were addressed across the school year—determining the pacing and sequence of skills at each grade level (Valerie, First Interview). By creating a schedule for teaching the TEKS, the district sought to address the problem of student mobility that would allow students to not miss content when changing schools within the district. In addition to providing information about the TEKS to be covered each week, the district also created their own learning objectives that were labeled "local" since they came from the district and not the state. The CRMs also included ideas and materials for teaching.

Another document provided by the district, purchased from an independent publisher, was called "side-by-sides." These documents contained charts that listed individual skills from the TEKS along with the questions asked on past TAKS tests that tested for the corresponding skill. Teachers felt these documents were helpful for teaching students to take the TAKS test. "I frequently use the side-by-sides to look at the format of questions and formulate my own questions about texts we are reading" (Caitlyn, First Interview). In addition to helping teachers understand the way frequency with which TEKS were tested and the way they were tested, teachers like Caitlyn found them helpful to learn the testing language in order to create their own "TAKS-like questions."

Staff Members as a Form of Support for Intermediate Grades

One aspect of the school's organization that provided support for teaching came from the way the time of staff members—administration, reading specialists, and the literacy coach—was used. Just as monetary resources were primarily used to provide support for the intermediate grades, so were staff members. These staff members supported teaching in a variety of ways that included supporting teachers with instruction as well as providing support for students.

Administrative support.

The main way administration organized to respond to and oversee teachers' practices was the creation of an instructional team. This group consisted of all three administrators (one principal plus two assistant principals) and all three instructional coaches (literacy, math, and science). The instructional team met every Friday morning

between one and two hours in the privacy of the principal's office. The agenda of the instructional meetings consisted of having each instructional coach check in and report on their work from the week with teachers including their planning meetings with grade levels and any other support they may have provided teachers. After hearing from each instructional coach, the agenda included getting input from everyone about school decisions, such as deciding which forms teachers should use to analyze their class data during a data analysis meeting or making decisions about the school budget. Lucia saw these meetings as an important way of keeping administrators and coaches connected so everyone was aware of what was going on at the school. For her, it was important that they be consistent with their meetings, something that did not regularly occur in past years. Because she valued these meeting so much, their time allotted for instructional meetings was closely preserved each week with the expectation that no one would have scheduling conflicts (Lucia, Final Interview). Another important aspect of these meetings was identifying teachers who needed support and thinking about ways to support them. This information usually came directly from the coaches and also from looking at data for each classroom teacher.

Learning walks were another way that administration provided extra support for teachers. These were times for a small group of teachers to be relieved from their classrooms for a couple of hours either by substitute teachers or by support staff in order to observe other teachers in the school. Teachers were selected to participate in learning walks either because they were identified as needing support or because they showed interest in learning from peers. Kayla described these walks:

> When we identify teachers who may need support then we tell them we'd like you to go on this learning walk and we'll have a specific objective. I think the next one will have a teacher go and focus on the environment because she's planning and instruction seems to be on target, but the environment isn't allowing the kids to benefit from all that. (Kayla, First Interview)

Kayla described having specific focuses for learning walks in areas that teachers needed support. Additionally, Kayla incorporated Flip videos into the learning walks to record observations so more than one teacher could see the same lesson (Instructional Meeting, 09/24/12). Overall, the learning walks were viewed as a constructive experience. The teachers who participated included 2nd through 4th grade teachers (Lucia, First Interview). While learning walks seemed to be a helpful way of supporting teachers, they were also difficult to sustain across the school year as testing dates drew nearer.

In one situation, Lucia worked directly with a teacher, Valerie (a 2nd grade teacher) much in the same way an instructional coach might work with a teacher identified as needing support. At the time, Valerie was in her fourth year of teaching at Brazos Elementary, having returned to teaching after taking a ten-year break to try a different career. She was originally hired as a 4th grade teacher, but was asked to teach 2nd grade after one year in 4th grade. Because Valerie seemed to struggle with so many aspects of her teaching, Lucia felt the need to move her out of a testing grade and to work directly with her. The movement of a teacher out of testing grades due to poor performance reflects the sort of demotion that occurs when teachers not only need support, but are also perceived as ineffective. Lucia supported Valerie by spending time in her classroom,

having weekly meetings with her, and having her read a professional book on classroom management (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 09/24/10). Valerie continued to be a topic of discussion in instructional meetings, with the coaches also providing information about their work with Valerie (Instructional Meeting, 01/28/11).

Administration also provided support for new teachers by assigning them a mentor. Mentor teachers were usually experienced teachers who were also familiar with the grade level the new teacher was teaching. Elena, a reading specialist, was the lead mentor teacher and was in charge of coordinating meetings. She had been a teacher at Brazos Elementary for 28 years; her tenure included being a reading specialist and classroom teacher. Her strong ties to the school came through in her approach to wanting to support teachers (Elena, First Interview).

Another way administration provided support for teachers came in the form of boosting morale, especially as teachers felt the pressure from high-stakes testing. Twice during the school year, the school provided a luncheon for teachers to help them feel appreciated. Also related to TAKS testing, administration, with Elena's help, organized a TAKS pep rally for the whole school to boost morale right before the administration of the TAKS test in April. The pep rally occurred at the end of the day in the school cafeteria with teachers putting on comical skits about testing for the students. Students in the primary grades participated by making signs and cheering for the intermediate grades students.

The support administration offered for teaching was usually aimed at the intermediate grades, although they often perceived of primary grades teachers as needing

support with their teaching. One area in particular involved how well teachers were perceived of being ready to teach literacy. Overall, the administrators and coaches did not feel their primary grades teachers were as well-equipped to teach literacy as the intermediate grades teachers. Lucia perceived the primary teachers as needing support with literacy teaching, particularly because they had just come out of a six year span under Reading First, a federal program which required teachers use "scientifically based literacy teaching practices" (Yatvin et al., 2003). Lucia explained,

> And last year was the first year that we did not have to follow Reading First guide lines…we still have teachers who have only known Reading First; who've only known to go by the exact script…And I think that's why we have some holes that are showing up, some issues, some big needs I think in primary, especially with literacy. (Lucia, First Interview)

Lucia felt that because teachers in the primary grades followed the guided and scripted Reading First program for so long, they did not necessarily have the foundation for strong literacy teaching. Lucia also saw writing as an area that primary grades teachers needed to improve.

> And as you can see, we didn't have a whole lot going on. We still had teachers thinking, 'oh I need to give them a clozed sentence and the kids can fill in, here's the vocabulary words, or here's a couple of words they can use to plug into that missing sentence.' Especially in Kindergarten. Where before, and they are the ones who are probably some of my oldest team members that have been there, in 1st and Kindergarten, very traditional. (Lucia, Final Interview)

While Lucia shared this perception with the other administrators and coaches, the urgency of supporting the intermediate grades superseded the need to support the primary grades teachers. As a result, the primary grades teachers (with the exception of Valerie) received very little support to change their literacy teaching practices.

Reading specialists.

The school employed four reading specialists. Only one was employed full-time (Elena) and only one was not bilingual (Whitney). The reading specialists' main responsibility was to work with students in small groups. This consisted of pulling between four and six students at a time either from one classroom or from multiple classes for 45 minutes. In this way, reading specialists supported the teachers by providing extra support for students identified as needing extra reading instruction. The time reading specialists spent working with students in small groups usually consisted of test preparation. While their main role often appeared to be supporting students with test taking strategies, Kayla, an assistant principal, emphasized to them during a reading specialists meeting with the literacy coach that they "aren't just here for TAKS, but to support kids" (Field Notes, Meeting, 12/14/10).

The reading specialists were only allocated to work with students in intermediate grades. The exception was that one reading specialist, Whitney, worked with some 2nd graders during the fall semester until her attention had to be directed only towards students testing in the spring semester. David, a 1st grade bilingual teacher, spoke about this decision.

The focus has really been on TAKS grades. First grade hasn't had reading

> specialists. I think administration understands that you can really help kids in earlier grades, but we are with limited resources. It's a resource issue. We've had to do it on our own. (David, First Interview)

In this quote, David saw the lack of support as a problem related to a lack of resources to help his students. He did not resent administration for making these structural decisions.

Other teachers held resentment towards administration that mirrored their feelings about the lack of resources for their teaching. Cathy, a Kindergarten teacher, reflected:

> Honestly, I don't feel supported in literacy. The ideal support would for a reading specialist to come and pull my low students or to meet during our team meetings to give us ideas on how to make our reading instruction better. (Cathy, Final Interview)

In this quote Cathy described how she did not feel supported as a Kindergarten teacher to teach literacy. She attributed this lack of support to the way the reading specialists' time was allocated to only working with students in the intermediate grades. She also saw the potential for support that could come from having a reading specialist help with grade level planning.

Reading specialists also helped teachers with administering assessments. This consisted of either testing small groups or individual students on the days common assessments were given. Placing students into small groups for testing was a practice that mirrored the testing accommodations used for the TAKS test.

While most teachers appreciated the support the reading specialists offered, there were some teachers who were left feeling unsupported by them. Connie, the 3rd and 4th

grade inclusion special education teacher, felt she and the reading specialists should have had more communication about supporting students. This was especially true for students who may have begun working with a reading specialist and then qualified for special education. In this case, the student would discontinue working with the reading specialist and work with the special education teacher instead.

> I have felt no collegiality between the reading specialists and the special ed team. There is no cohesiveness. I don't mean to imply that people haven't been friendly, but there seems to be no 'passing of the baton' when a student moves from the reading specialist to special ed. I think this is odd since the trajectory for students to enter special ed usually has them pass through the doors of a reading specialist program. I was surprised at the lack of discussion there was between camps as students are passed from one to another. One of my students attended the reading specialist program and I never knew anything about that work. Being new, I kept a low profile regarding this. But I thought it was counter-productive. This coming year, I may make greater attempts to communicate with the reading specialist that works with a special ed student. (Connie, Final Interview)

Connie was in her first year of teaching at Brazos Elementary, but had 25 years total of teaching experience in other school districts. Her comment shows what she perceived to be a flaw in the way reading specialists were used, with little communication between them and the special education teachers.

For Paula, a 3rd grade teacher, receiving support from a reading specialist meant having to compromise on the strategies she was teaching her students for test taking. This

created some dissonance between her and Whitney. In the following quote, Paula described how she and Whitney disagreed on a strategy for teaching students to break reading passages up into smaller parts—what she referred to as "chunking":

> That's one of the things Whitney and I have disagreed on when they are chunking. Little things like that. She has them do a line to divide and I have them do brackets. We had a big to-do about that. To me it's not that big of a deal, they do what they are comfortable with but she felt like it was too much on a page. I tell them to do what they feel comfortable with, not one specific way even though that's what she's trying to do. That was kind of uncomfortable for a while. (Paula, Final Interview)

In Paula's case, sharing her students with another teacher was problematic because it also called for the need to be consistent with teaching practices where test taking was concerned.

The literacy coach.

Gina played a large role in supporting intermediate grades teachers. Her influence could be seen in a variety of ways in the classrooms that included the use of reading workshop, the organization of classroom libraries, and text choice. Her influence was also seen in conversations teachers had as part of their planning meetings or as part of the teacher inquiry groups that Gina organized.

Gina's position was highly valued by teachers and administration. Even when budget cuts made it seem as if her position would not continue to be funded by the district, Lucia advocated for her position and insisted she would find a way to ensure her

position, even if this meant reallocating funds (Lucia, First Interview). While Lucia was a strong supporter of Gina's position to work with the intermediate grades teachers, she did not advocate in the same way for the funding of a similar position to work with the primary grades teachers. In the past, when the school was part of Reading First, the school received federal money to staff a literacy coach who only worked with the primary grades teachers. Once the grant ended, the literacy coach position was lost and Lucia did not advocate for the refunding of this position (Gina, Final Interview). This suggests the view Lucia had about where the most support was needed in terms of supporting test taking.

Lucia appreciated and trusted Gina to make the right decisions (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 04/15/11). Not only did Lucia tell Gina that she trusted her, but Gina also felt that trust in all aspects of her job. In describing her relationship with Lucia, Gina said,

> Even things like resources…I'm able to tell Lucia, we aren't going to use that, there's something else we are going to use that's better quality and less chaotic or whatever. She lets me do that. She trusts that I can make decisions about those kinds of things that will serve kids well. (Gina, Final Interview)

The trusting relationship she shared with Lucia helped Gina to be able to do her job as she saw fit. Gina did not feel micro-managed or constrained in her position. In this way, she had autonomy to define her role as a literacy coach and to make decisions.

Because of her job duties, which included working with teachers, but also included participation in instructional meetings and making school decisions, Gina often

felt conflicted by the two sides to her job.

> Sometimes I've worried often if I'm able to maintain a balance. I think the teachers are aware how involved I am in the decision making process and I've always worried that would at some point maybe intimidate them or keep them from coming to me with things. But I don't see that it has. I think it's more so made them feel like they can come to me with things and ask me to speak on their behalf about whatever is going on or not working of them or things like that. (Gina, Final Interview)

While Gina often worried about how the teachers viewed her role, she also felt confident that she could speak on their behalf when information needed to be communicated to administration. In particular, Gina saw herself as a decision maker who stood up for teachers and students:

> I do want to be a decision maker, I don't ever want to be an administrator, but I do want to be a decision maker for things that affect kids and teachers because I feel like a lot of people who are making decisions for them don't have their best interests at heart. It's getting worse and worse right now with budget cuts and stuff like that. I'll keep speaking up as long as they keep listening. (Gina, Final Interview)

Gina's role as a literacy coach included numerous aspects, which often varied depending on the time of the school year. Sometimes her role included providing training for teachers on matters like teaching test taking strategies or on using guided reading (Field Notes, Instructional Meetings, 09/24/10, 01/06/11). Other ways Gina influenced

planning included facilitating weekly grade level meetings for 2nd through 5th grade teachers; facilitating meetings to look at student data and provide instructions on how to prepare for the TAKS test; making sure teachers understand the content of what they are teaching; and helping teachers interpret the TEKS (the state standards and objectives). Ways that Gina supported teachers in their classrooms included coming in to confer with students during writing and reading times; helping to coordinate grade level writing celebrations; providing materials, including trade books; modeling instruction in classrooms; observing teachers and providing feedback on their teaching; team teaching with teachers; mentoring a novice teacher; and helping teachers organize their classroom libraries. Gina described her work in the classrooms focusing on student and teacher talk during lessons and how supported students were to take responsibility of tasks (Gina, Final Interview). While there were instances in which administration asked Gina to specifically work with certain teachers, a large part of her work was a result of building relationships with teachers.

Another aspect of Gina's job included working with students. In the spring semester, she met with small groups of students to provide interventions before testing.

> I always feel like it changes and not so much in a fun way once the springtime hits. In the fall I get to do a lot of the coaching and a lot of time in classrooms. Helping teachers set up routines and reading workshop and writing workshop and things like that. It seems like once January hits, it's switching over into more data and materials management and things like that. I do get to work with kids in the spring more. So I'm doing less work in classroom with teachers and more

> supporting kids outside of the classroom. And mostly just supporting them for the state tests. So it's not quite as much fun. (Gina, Final Interview)

Just as teachers were expected to shift their teaching to be more aligned with test taking strategies, Gina also had to shift her job to support teachers and students in this.

As much as Gina loved working as a literacy coach, it sometimes conflicted with her personal beliefs, in similar ways that teachers felt conflicted by testing.

> I just don't know yet how to work in a system like this and, I mean I know how to do what I believe and I feel like we're getting better at balancing that, but I still don't feel like I get to spend my time doing only the things that I think really matter for kids and there are just some things that we have to do even if we don't feel like they're what's best for kids. I hate that but I think, so sometimes when I think about this job I think it's a tricky, I don't like being in that middle position. That's the part of the job that I struggle with the most, being that in the middle person and sometimes having to say here's this, let's talk about these curriculum road maps. But I struggle with that aspect of the job if I feel like I don't always get to be 100% who I want to be for teachers and kids. And I know teachers feel that way too. They don't always get to be the teacher that they would want to be in an ideal world because there's just these things that we have to work with. (Gina, Final Interview)

Being a literacy coach at Brazos Elementary often meant dictating expectations for test preparation to teachers and having to take up that role in addition to promoting the literacy practices she believed in was often troublesome for Gina. She recognized that their work was part of a larger system that she and the other teachers had to work under.

For them, teaching meant abiding by certain rules, regardless of personal feelings or beliefs.

Despite the promotion of literacy practices such as test preparation that she did not always believe in, Gina was well-respected by teachers as someone who was helpful and knowledgeable. This appreciation was expressed in interviews and team meeting as teachers acknowledged the importance of Gina's role and support. For example, June expressed her gratitude for and acknowledgement of all Gina did.

> I think Gina does a great job…Gina's been a very strong advocate for literacy and I thinks she's very intelligent and well-read and up to date on lots of research so she disseminates that information to everyone…and she's making sure that teachers are current with research. (June, First Interview)

Nicki, a 4th grade teacher like June, described Gina as part of a professional learning community. "You know she was under that umbrella of evaluating me, but I think maybe we've removed that because we've become this professional learning community where we're all learning from each other" (Nicki, First Interview). In this quote, Nicki described Gina and her teammates as being a part of a community that learned from each other, rather than seeing Gina as an evaluator or outsider.

The apprentice teachers placed at the school, four in all, who were in their final semester of student teaching, also saw Gina as a source of support and guidance. Josie, a student teacher, reflected on what she saw Gina doing to support teachers:

> Having Gina talk once a week and give ideas. I feel like this place is so flexible. Here's what you need to do, here's one way you could do it. Here's another way.

> Everybody's open to suggestions. That's the biggest support, knowing you can try stuff on your own and if it doesn't work out, then it doesn't work out and nobody's going to hound you about it. And if you're totally lost and don't know what to do, you have someone like Gina who can come in and help you, even read a book to you or show you something you might want to read from her. I hope wherever I end up I have someone like her. We have similar philosophies and preparation. (Josie, Interview with student teachers)

Josie referred to the fact that the teacher preparation program she and Gina went through was with the same professor as part of reading specialization cohort. Because of this, Josie and the other apprentice teachers closely related to Gina's view of teaching and learning. Being part of the school system that involved teaching and planning, the apprentice teachers drew on Gina's expertise in similar ways to the teachers.

Even teachers who posed certain challenges for Gina expressed their appreciation for her. "I love having the reading coach and her knowledge of books and style of books for what we teach, like character. She gives us lists. I see her mentally as a resource and physically to borrow books from" (Valerie, Final Interview). Gina felt Valerie was difficult to work with because she did not readily take up the teaching practices Gina shared with her. Gina also struggled to work with Paula who was in her 4th year of teaching at Brazos Elementary, having returned to teaching after a 15-year break, for similar reasons. Even though they had their differences, Paula still recognized Gina as a source of influence and like Valerie, appreciated Gina's help with recommending books and resources (Paula, First Interview).

Another teacher who Gina struggled to work with was Rolando, a 5th grade bilingual teacher. Rolando and Gina often had different ideas about how to teach. Rolando recognized their differences while also recognizing her as a support. "Gina has always been a great support, even though we don't always agree in what direction the students should take to learn reading" (Rolando, Final Interview).

While Gina had a strong, positive influence on many teachers, the extent of her work did not pass to grades from Pre-Kindergarten to 2nd. Her work with teachers was largely due to how her job was originally created to only support 4th and 5th grade teachers from a grant a few years ago. Over time, Gina began working with 2nd and 3rd grade teachers as well, but did not provide support for Pre-Kindergarten through 1st grade teachers. In the beginning of the school year, she attempted to help the 1st grade teachers during their planning after they asked her to attend their meetings, but because of time restrictions and some negative experiences, she did not attempt to work with them the rest of the year. Her negative experiences were due to the perception she had that their points of view about students was different from her own. In a meeting with the reading specialists, Gina shared, "they [1st grade teachers] don't think their kids can do anything" (Field Notes, Reading Specialists Meeting, 09/07/10). Gina's perception of how the 1st grade teachers viewed their students as having deficits caused her to be frustrated them and she did not pursue more opportunities to work with them (Gina, Final Interview).

Karen expressed her frustration with not receiving support from Gina:

> Actually at Kindergarten, I don't feel supported. …I don't feel supported. Do I feel there's support for upper grades? Yes. TAKS grades, yes. Gina is the reading coach.

> I have not ever seen her come to any of our meetings. We've had the science coach come, we've had the math coach come. Not ever the reading coach. She stays with upper grades. (Karen, Final Interview)

Karen's frustration and feeling of lack of support relates back to how resources were divided in the school to support the intermediate grades. Her comment also serves as a reminder that while Gina was an influential support for intermediate grades, her primary role was to support them because of the state tests.

Differences Among Grade Levels in Attention Given to Bilingual Education

Bilingual education was another aspect of school organization that was affected by testing. Coming directly from state legislation about bilingual education, students whose parents indicated Spanish as their first language and did not opt out of bilingual education were placed in classrooms where teachers where certified as bilingual Spanish/English teachers (S.B. 121, 1973). At Brazos Elementary, because of the high enrollment of students whose first language was Spanish, being in a bilingual classroom meant all students were native Spanish speakers in the class (as opposed to having a classroom mixed with some native Spanish speakers and some native English speakers). While state legislation mandated that students be provided with bilingual education, there were no mandates about how teachers were expected to teach in one or both languages. The only provision provided to address this in the Texas Education Code states, "The amount of instruction in each language within the bilingual education program shall be commensurate with the students' level of proficiency in each language and their level of

academic achievement" (21 Tex. Reg. 5700, 1996). How this was interpreted at the individual level meant an inconsistent mix of how teachers used Spanish and English.

For Celestina, a 3rd grade bilingual teacher, this was a source of tension as she did not feel bilingual education was clearly defined or strongly supported at the school or district level except to determine the language of testing for students. Since only students in the intermediate grades were tested, students in the primary grades were not given the same amount of attention with regard to their language of instruction.

> If you are talking about what bilingual education should look like in 3rd grade here, who knows? If you go into our three different classes here, it's going to look different. Besides having everything coded in red and blue [English words written in red and Spanish words written in blue], I don't know. We know that at the beginning of the year if they are reading at a 24 [level used on the Developmental Reading Assessment] and depending on what their TELPAS [Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System] scores were from the last year, that's how we make our reading groups and then how we start deciding who tests in what language. That's the only overt time that it's like, okay this is what you have to follow, this is how you are going to know that these kids are reading in English or reading in Spanish and then at a mid-point looking at their benchmarks from the year. They're going to be testing in this language. Besides that time when we meet together for that, I don't know anything else. (Celestina, Final Interview)

From Celestina's point of view, bilingual education only received attention when it came down to the TAKS test and determining students' language of testing. She felt

uncomfortable with the lack of support for bilingual teachers to provide consistent, quality instruction.

Typically, bilingual education meant that teachers in the primary grades used the greatest amount of Spanish while teachers in the intermediate grades used less, especially in the 5th grade classrooms. The main explanation for this related to administration's desire to see students transitioned into English as quickly as possible in terms of taking the state test. Lucia explained:

> But we're still seeing our LEP [Limited English] population, for some reason our kids, I think we need to transition a little earlier. Kids that transitioned later, under a later exit model that had been in place with the district are those kids that still are having trouble passing any of their TAKS tests. (Lucia, Final Interview)

Because of the historic difference in test scores between Spanish and English (Instructional Meeting, 12/06/10; Reading Specialists Meeting, 12/14/10), and the acknowledgement that students would no longer receive bilingual education services once they moved onto middle school, administration urged intermediate grades teachers to transition students to English as soon as possible for testing purposes.

For June, placing test scores above everything else came at the cost of promoting language learning for her English language learners.

> But this year and the closer we get to TAKS, and I know that's leadership answering to their leadership, I feel like our school is starting to feel like it's really defined by TAKS scores. That really frustrates me and makes me feel mad. But people who I really trust, and still do, but hearing things from them like, oh,

> maybe we shouldn't have transitioned this kid and maybe they should still be testing in Spanish because they might have passed but they might not have passed in English. It bothers me because then it feels like it's more about the test scores. (June, Mid-year Interview)

From her perspective, students' language of testing was based primarily on anticipated passing rates. While administration pushed for students to test in English, they also wanted students to obtain passing scores. The benchmark tests provided an indication of student progress that helped them to finalize decisions about students' testing language. The focus on test scores rather than on students' individual learning frustrated teachers like June, who did not agree with the emphasis placed on test scores.

Primary teachers were also encouraged to being reading in English earlier on with students. Lucia perceived primary bilingual teachers as not teaching English with more frequency largely because of their experience with Reading First in the past, which did not allow for Spanish and English to be used during the same block of teaching time (Lucia, First Interview). Again, while Lucia saw a need to support primary teachers, the high priority of focusing on passing the state test meant primary grades teachers were not supported with providing more English instruction.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at school organization with regard to high-stakes testing to answer the question: *How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?* Using a definition of school reform that expands beyond just a formal set of movements initiated from an outsider or prescribed

program is revealing about the ways in which schools act in response to accountability measures tied to standardized testing (Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002). The organization of Brazos Elementary, specifically the division between primary and intermediate grades, reflected inequitable decisions made to support achievement on high-stakes testing through the use of monetary resources, support staff, and the attention given to bilingual education. While there was acknowledgement that the school needed to address much more beyond the scope of testing (e.g., supporting teachers and students in the primary grades), administrators and teachers made decisions that favored test preparation, especially when monetary resources and staffing were limited. In some cases, testing called attention to certain aspects of the school's organization that otherwise received little attention (i.e., bilingual education). The decisions administration made about organizing Brazos Elementary may not have been ideal in terms of what they thought was absolutely best for their teachers and students, but reflect the pressure schools are placed under when they have obligations to accountability measures and school quality has been reduced to a single factor, test scores (Brandt, 2007).

This study expands our understanding of how schools organize themselves beyond problems of grouping, assigning teachers to groups, time management, and assessing student progress to also encompass decisions made by administrative staff about high-stakes testing. The decisions schools make about how to address high-stakes tests reflects the ways in which large-scale reform efforts are interpreted. These decisions also reflect the fear decision makers have about testing outcomes where decisions are made to immediately address testing concerns without paying attention to the larger

trajectory of students' school experiences. This raises concerns about the implications of focusing on testing to the detriment of addressing or improving the quality of teaching and learning in the primary grades.

While high-stakes testing is only administered to intermediate grades, this study shows how the entire school's organization was affected by testing in ways that created unequal conditions for teachers and ultimately students. The uneven allocation of monetary resources and support staff inflated test preparation for the intermediate grades while denying the primary grades of equal support. In terms of bilingual education, rather than devote attention to quality of instruction and materials to develop students' language skills across grade levels, attention came in the form of determining students' testing language with priority given to the likelihood of passing. The decisions made about all three of these aspects of school organization—monetary resources, allocation of staff members, and bilingual education—created a distorted image of schools as cohesive enterprises where the best interest of everyone is served.

CHAPTER 5: "WHAT THE KIDS ARE JUDGED ON": TEST PREPARATION AS LITERACY TEACHING PRACTICES

At Brazos Elementary, test preparation permeated literacy instruction so much that it is impossible to separate literacy practices from test preparation. The dependence on test preparation as literacy teaching reflects a history of narrow literacy practices reduced to skills in isolation in low-income schools (Apple, 2002). The culture that creates these inequitable learning conditions is reactive to pressures for accountability. Test preparation represents a disconnected approach to literacy teaching in which students are acted upon to perform tasks rather than asked to use literacy in meaningful ways. It belongs to a larger system of standardization that is meant to make practices more regulated and controlled, rather than transformative or responsive to social practices, purposes, and contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

This chapter answers the question: *At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff members respond to them?* It examines test preparation at Brazos Elementary in order to show how teachers' literacy teaching responded to reform efforts that emphasized test preparation as a sanctioned and expected literacy practice. Drawing on my analysis of field notes of classroom interactions and meetings as well as transcripts of interviews, I developed the findings for this chapter based the three themes that occurred with frequency related to how testing influenced literacy instruction. These three themes include: teachers organized their schedules and class time to accommodate test preparation; teachers taught students to take the tests; and teachers used assessments to

track student progress. Across these themes, there was the common theme that teachers experienced tensions between their ideas about quality literacy instruction and how they were asked to teach to the test.

In order to uphold the instructional teams' curricular decisions based on testing, teachers often had to make changes—without necessarily contributing to the decision making process. The requirements placed on teachers to comply with test preparation works to position them as merely a means to an end without autonomy or freedom to make choices that differ from the mainstream instructional practices found at Brazos Elementary. This representation of teachers does little to highlight them as professionals, but rather treats them as silent, contributing parts of a larger system, similar to a factory worker on an assembly line. The result was that teachers had to worry about procedures and expectations (e.g., the protocol for dividing students up for test preparation) for things that may have seemed ambiguous (e.g., the steps for reading a TAKS passage) and were not directly related to literacy or how one uses literacy. Instead of being asked to focus on their own knowledge of teaching literacy or offering quality literacy instruction where students receive support based on individual instructional needs, literacy teaching practices were reduced to monotonous, routinized ways of doing things.

This positioning of teachers and the resulting practices send the wrong message to students about what reading and writing are, and sends the wrong message to teachers about their roles as professionals. Students in low-income schools, such as Brazos Elementary, experienced a distorted depiction of literacy where testing is privileged as well as the school literacy practices that accompany test taking. Further, students are

positioned as "at risk" in this model of literacy instruction, which does little to challenge the deficit notion of students with low socio-economic status. The continual focus on test preparation for these students perpetuates their limited education while also working to confine them to such limited experiences as accountability measures increase and testing grows further and further from promoting equitable practices. In the following sections I support these arguments by showing the ways in which test preparation dominated literacy teaching. I conclude with a look at the tensions teachers had with teaching in this way.

Organizing Schedules and Class Time to Accommodate Test Preparation

In the beginning of the year, the literacy coach wanted teachers to focus on setting up their reading and writing workshops, or as she called it "quality teaching" (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 12/06/10) with little to no emphasis on test preparation. Her philosophy about not beginning the school year doing test preparation was reflected in teachers' practices. For example, Caitlyn, a 5th grade teacher, described this decision collectively by saying, "we don't believe in doing TAKS practice all year" (Caitlyn, Final Interview).

Arturo, a 3rd grade bilingual teacher, also described this and how the transition to test preparation occurred.

> Next week, before spring break, we need to see where the students are so we can plan ahead and make a plan before the real TAKS. Everything is TAKS, TAKS, TAKS right now. But in the beginning we didn't even mention TAKS so the kids wouldn't be scared. Since the first week they asked when they are going to have

> the TAKS and I tell them let's now worry about that now. Reading is more important than everything else. (Arturo, Mid-year Interview)

While teachers may have begun the year without focusing on test preparation, there eventually came a time when they did have to shift their focus. This shift occurred in January, at the start of the second semester, and required that teachers change their class schedules so as to accommodate time for test preparation. Administration and the district expected this revision. Nicki, a 4th grade teacher, felt conflicted by the shifts they made to allow more time for test preparation.

> It starts to look different because of testing. I love setting up reading workshops and writing workshops and book nooks and having them reflect, and you get all this down in the system and they're really good at it and then TAKS comes around, and groups start getting pulled, and data days where we have to start forming groups, they're just so many things that interfere with that rhythm, sadly, because I like that. With people coming in and out and having to do the TAKS models all the time, it changes and not for the better. (Nicki, Final Interview)

The changes Nicki described are similar to what Au (2007) found in terms of how high-stakes testing controls the content of what gets taught, reduces the curriculum to isolated parts, and relies on teacher-centered practices.

During the literacy block, this shift often meant having time for small group test preparation in addition to whole group test preparation. The small group time consisted of grouping students with similar needs, or scores on benchmark data, so teachers could meet with them to work on test taking strategies (e.g., Field Notes, Arturo, 03/31/11).

This time usually replaced what had been guided reading, when teachers met with small groups of students to support them with reading texts on their instructional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Many teachers still called this time guided reading, even though the time was spent on test practice with materials that resembled the test.

Making adjustments to the classroom schedule also meant some subject areas received a reduced amount of time to allow more time for other areas. Taking time away from non-tested subjects is a common approach schools use to accommodate test preparation (Jacob, 2005). For example, when the 4th grade teachers needed to increase the amount of time for writing instruction to an hour and a half each day (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 01/28/11), they took time away from teaching science, which was not tested at the 4th grade level. When the writing test was over and it was time to focus more on the math and reading tests, the 4th grade teachers reduced their writing time to make accommodations (June, Final Interview).

In 5th grade, science received more instruction because of the state administered science test. Russell, a 5th grade teacher, felt that there was really "no teaching going on until after TAKS because there is so much TAKS prep going on" (Field Notes, Russell, 02/11/11). He described the ways in which kids were shuffled around depending on their needs and how students who did well in reading and math received more science instruction. Social studies was a subject area that was not tested at the elementary level, so many teachers fit it in by integrating it into their language arts instruction (e.g., the 5th grade teachers taught a unit on the Civil War during their language arts time), a better alternative to not teaching social studies at all.

TAKS camp.

TAKS camp was a reform effort by the school that required more schedule changes. The goal of having a TAKS camp was to provide even more focused time for test preparation four weeks before the reading and writing test dates. Building on the test taking strategies teachers had been teaching all along, TAKS camp provided teachers with one hour daily to meet with smaller student groups based on needs (as evidenced by scores on benchmark assessments) and language of instruction. Support staff such as the literacy coach, reading specialists, administrators, and even student teachers helped with providing small group instruction. The division of students into smaller groups required a lot of coordination to group students and have them all covered by a teacher. In an instructional meeting, Gina, the literacy coach, described TAKS camp as "replacing normal life" and taking the place of core instruction. The plan Gina and the instructional team developed for TAKS camp was based on a district reform, but with their own adaptations. Where the district's plan dictated students rotate from teacher to teacher in 20-minute increments, the plan implemented at Brazos Elementary kept students with the same teacher for one hour. They also chose their own materials rather than the ones provided by the district, which Gina felt were not high quality enough (Gina, Mid-year, Interview).

The plan for reading TAKS camp for 3rd-5th grades was for teachers to cover two reading passages in a week between Monday and Thursday with Friday reserved for assessment (Field Notes, Instructional Meeting, 03/11/11). The hour instructional time provided Monday through Thursday was teacher-centered as the teacher was seen as the

expert who informed students of how to complete the reading test. This decontextualized approach to teaching reading did not take into account individual differences students or groups of students might have had with regard to their reading levels or sociocultural needs (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

For writing TAKS camp, students were generally grouped by the language of testing and the writing score they consistently scored on weekly assessments (using the state scoring system of 1 through 4, with 1 being a failing grade and 2 considered passing). When talking to 4th grade teachers about TAKS camp, Gina encouraged them by saying,

> It's fun because you get to work with different kids. It helps keep the drag of TAKS not so draggish. You might have one group that is solid 2s and 3s that you are working on getting to 4s and then solid 1s you are getting to 2s. (Field Notes, 4th Grade Meeting, 12/13/10)

The attempt was for teachers to work with small groups of students with similar writing scores to help them improve their writing scores.

Students were expected to produce one composition per week as part of writing TAKS camp. The composition was in response to a prompt (e.g., "write about a time with a special friend") similar to what might be on the writing test. Teachers began the week with reading aloud a children's book that related to the prompt and then led students through brainstorming ideas that related to the prompt. Students then wrote two quick writes based on the topic. Quick writes were short, unrevised/unedited responses that students were to write quickly as a way of producing an idea in a brief amount of time.

By Wednesday, students chose one of their quick writes to take through the writing process and develop into a final composition that was due by Friday.

Some of this time was also devoted to practicing the multiple-choice part of the test in which students had to made decisions about revising and editing. The writing camp structure stretched out the test taking process that students would normally do in one day to an entire week.

> So it's very formulaic and very cyclical. It is very hard when you have students who just struggle to get writing. There's still that fear like I don't have anything to say and I feel like that's really hard when you know we're moving, by Friday something has to get written. I feel like it's like a double-edged sword because you want them to feel that the pace is a lot faster because they are writing the story in a day when they actually take the test, but that's not real writing…That creativity part can easily become detached so it's hard to keep them excited about writing when they know it's a formula. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Sasha's description of writing TAKS camp illustrates the structured approach to teaching writing that her team members were expected to take up. Students engaged in decontextualized writing strategies that supported standardized test taking where the purpose for writing was reduced to answering a prompt, rather than writing for authentic purposes and audiences in meaningful ways.

Teaching the Language of the Test and Test Taking Strategies

Teachers had to make adjustments to their schedules to incorporate TAKS camp and other test preparation time. They also had to pay special attention to the ways they

taught their students to take the tests. There were two main approaches they used to teach test preparation that consisted of teaching students the language of the test and teaching them strategies for completing the tests. Both of these approaches supported autonomous views of literacy that treats literacy as solely cognitive skills and abilities (Street, 1995).

The language of the test.

Teachers familiarized themselves with the language used on the test so they could then help their students learn the language of the test. This involved a lot of talk about the sentence stems, or "TAKS talk" (Field Notes, Celestina, 02/09/11) used on the reading test. The sentence stems were parts of a sentence or question that students could read to figure out the type of skill being tested. Knowing the tested skill was the first step, and then students learned strategies for answering different types of questions.

Familiarizing students with the testing language involved lots of teacher talk about the wording on practice passages. For example, when working with a small group of students, Rory, a 4th grade teacher, told them,

> The reader can tell…What else? The reader can conclude…From what the reader learns… I am going to tell you a hint. Lucky you are in this group because I have lots of hints. Put a star because it's usually about how a character feels. Those character traits we are learning about…if we understand our character all we have to do is say that's true about my character or that's not true, she wouldn't do that. So our strategy then, is going to be true or false? You can ask yourself, would my character do that? Or say that? (Field Notes, Rory, 03/29/11)

In this example, Rory pointed out the wording that was associated with questions about

character traits and then described a strategy for answering these types of questions. Rory also used a testing word bank to help her students learn the testing language. Her word bank consisted of words that were important because students were likely going to encounter them on the TAKS test, for example words like "probably" and "mostly" (Field Notes, Rory, 01/20/11).

Charts with the testing language on them were common. For example, Arturo and Celestina, both bilingual 3rd grade teachers, created a chart for inferring that included the sentence stems: *The reader can tell that ___ is ____ because ____.* (Field Notes, Arturo, 02/14/11; Celestina, 02/09/11). Focusing attention on learning the language used on the tests to talk about reading or how one might respond to literature was a strategy teachers used to prepare students for the test. This approach, while revered as a way of preparing students for the tests, was removed from authentic practices linked to responding to literature in ways that invite multiple interpretations (Rosenblatt, 1968), and reduced literacy to a practice of skills and answering multiple-choice questions where there is only one right answer (Smith, 1991)

Reading test strategies.

Teaching students strategies to use for the reading test often involved the use of materials that closely resembled the TAKS test such as photocopies of test preparation materials, workbooks, or teacher created questions to accompany texts read aloud in class (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985). When working with the whole group, students received their own copy of the material while teachers used a document camera to project

a copy for the whole class to see how they wrote on the test. When working with small groups, each student received their own copy while teachers also had their own copy.

Modeling how to complete a test was a large part of how teachers taught strategies.

> Modeling involved going through each strategy step by step while the teacher thought aloud about what to do, directly told students what to do, or asked students to provide answers about what to do. This practice of teaching to the test relied on teacher-centered instruction where the teacher was viewed as the authority giving information to students about what to do. Asking students answer-known questions, such as "what is the first thing I should do when reading this passage?" also reinforced the belief that there was one correct way to enact literacy practices within this context. In terms of reading the material, teachers usually asked students to engage in shared reading, having everyone read aloud with the teacher (Field Notes, Caitlyn, 12/09/12).

The first time Arturo introduced test-taking strategies to his class, he told them, "We have never seen this, this is the first time. Everything I do, you have to do tomorrow, so just watch. Tomorrow you do it and I watch" (Field Notes, Arturo, 10/28/10). Arturo then proceeded to go through a reading passage and talked about the steps he took along the way. He expected his students to follow along so they would be able to use the same steps on their own. This release of responsibility began with him, the expert, giving knowledge to the students about what to do.

Teachers often narrowed the curriculum to focus on specific skills, particularly

the ones most tested, as part of test preparation. Using assessments to make decisions about what skills/objectives they needed to focus on, test preparation usually involved reteaching skills that were addressed in the fall semester. Skills such as inferring, using context clues, and main idea were commonly retaught for reading across all three testing grade levels. In the following excerpt, Rory talked to her students about main idea.

> Main idea is something we use in our brains all the time. It's how we evaluate texts. What's the main idea of this? Is this something I am going to want to read? Not just a testing skill, but something we do naturally. One way we can do it and think about how our brains are working on that skill (Field Notes, Rory, 02/23/11).

During this session, Rory retaught main idea in the context of test taking, but also explained how it is something that readers do, not just when taking tests. This was an attempt to link the teaching of main idea to a practice that readers do outside of test preparation. It also reinforced the notion that reading is a cognitive skill that takes place inside the brain.

Teachers described test taking as teaching students to interact with each reading passage. This meant asking students to write directly on the reading passage to show their thinking. A common strategy was to ask students to break each reading passage up into smaller sections, "chunks," (Field Notes, 3rd Grade Meeting, 10/26/10) where students would stop in order to write a "WGO" (*What's Going On?).* WGOs were meant to get students thinking about the important events or ideas that were brought up within each chunk. This was an attempt to link the reading on tests to other kinds of reading activities.

In describing how she went through reading passages with students, Erin, a 5th grade teacher, said,

> I pick points to stop at along the way to ask kids *what's going on*, what does that mean, what do you think is going to happen next, how is the character feeling? Things like that that they have to know for TAKS but also things you have to know as a reader to help you understand and make it enjoyable and follow along. (Erin, First Interview)

This formulaic approach to teaching test taking was another example of how test preparation isolated literacy habits from social practices linked to meaningful purposes for using literacy, but rather took up the belief that students were lacking in certain skills.

Because teachers were expected to use the same test taking strategies, and received training on how what strategies to use, there was not much variation between classes. Below is a representative example of how teachers taught students to read the passages. In this excerpt taken from field notes, Arturo went through a TAKS passage with his entire class. Some students had copies of the text in English and some had it in Spanish, depending on their language of testing. He switched back and forth between both languages. Only English is transcribed here and words in italics mean those were the recorded words of the speakers.

> Students suggest reading the title and doing a prediction and deciding if it is fiction or non-fiction. Arturo says they should look at text features and figure out what kind of text they are going to read. *Fiction or non-fiction*? He models looking at the photographs. *I am going to read the caption. What type of text is*

this? Students say it is non-fiction. Arturo models writing "non-fiction" at top of his paper. He goes back to second photo and asks students about it. They say it's inside of a spaceship. Arturo asks if the woman is flying and student says, *no, she is floating.* Arturo explains that there is no gravity. Arturo asks what to do next. Student says make a prediction and Arturo asks what to do before that. Arturo says to read the title because it's going to tell him what it's going to be about. He circles the title and models reading it aloud. He says aloud that it's a name and points to the photo of her. *Write "astronauta" next to her name*. He asks who is Mae Jemison, *is she a teacher? No, an astronaut*. Now I am ready to make a prediction. He asks students to make their predictions. *Before I read the text I need to interact with the text before reading it.* Felicia (student): *She is going to NASA*. Arturo asks her to explain what NASA is because not everyone knows. Asks another student what NASA is. Student says it's a spaceship. Another student says it's a place where they prepare for space. Arturo confirms what student says that it's a place where they research for going into space. Arturo writes at the top of the page- *they are going to explore outer space*. *Before reading we talk about the text. Before reading don't just go straight to the reading, need to interact with it first. I need to think what is it going to be about. A*sks Felicia to tell her two things he did. She says they did a prediction. Another student says they decided if it's fiction or non-fiction. Arturo models picking a spot to read to. He draws a line under the 3rd paragraph and says he is going to read paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and then write the most important ideas. *Just like what Ms.*

Anderson [Gina] did this morning. Tells everyone they need to be reading and at the same pace. Not running and trying to finish first. *Reading is thinking.* Some reading in English and some in Spanish. Let's start reading. They read aloud all together. Arturo points to his paper. Asks student if she is lost. Arturo: *Mae had two dreams. What were they? The first one she wants to become a doctor and the second one is to explore space. Can we write it down as important?* Arturo models writing in the margin. *Mae had two dreams: doctor and space explorer. Which goal did she complete? Can we keep reading?* (Field Notes, Arturo, 10/28/10)

They continued to read the rest of the passage. In this session, Arturo guided his students through the reading portion of the passage by following steps that involved reading the title, deciding if the text is non-fiction or fiction, making predictions, and reading in chunks with time to stop and think about what was read. When Arturo told his class that this is just like what Ms. Anderson did this morning, he was referring to when Gina came in to model test taking strategies for Arturo. This example of Arturo's class is representative of the practices seen across all testing-grade levels where test preparation, and therefor literacy practices, were reduced to formulaic step-by-step procedures.

Answering the reading questions received similar teaching strategies in terms of going through the test questions together with lots of teacher modeling. Teachers taught students to analyze the test questions in order to decide what type of question it was (i.e., a question about summary) and then to know a strategy to use for that type of question.

The following is an excerpt from field notes of Celestina's bilingual 3rd grade

class where she went through test questions with a small group of students.

> They read aloud the first question. Celestina says they are going to underline important words. They underline Jim Hensen. *He worked with puppets. Why did he do that?* They go back to the text. *We just have to read the WGO. We don't have to read the whole paragraph.* Reiterates that they are in the text. Prompts student to say "I think that…" Celestina shows how the student found where the answer will be based on her WGO. Repeats the question. Students look for the answer. Juanita finds the answer. Celestina tells the group that everyone needs to listen. Asks what words in the sentence have the answer. They all look for the sentence. Celestina tells them all to put their pencil on the first word. *Everyone is going to read the sentence*. They read. Asks each student individually why he made the puppets. They each say that he needed a job. They flip back to the page with the question and write in: *he needed a job.* (Field Notes, Celestina, 11/11/10)

During this small group time, Celestina guided her students through the test questions and expected them to use their WGOs to help them go back into the passage to find the answers. When she asked each student to tell her the answer and to write in the answer, she was using a strategy that other teachers used in which they did not print the answer choices for the questions. This required students to think of their own answer without being able to guess by looking at the options.

Writing test strategies.

The writing test consisted of two parts: a multiple choice section in which students read short passages and then answered questions about the best way to revise or

edit the passage, and a section where students had to write a composition, no longer than two pages. To prepare for both parts of the test, teachers spent time using photocopies of passages that closely resembled the TAKS section on "revising and editing," and also taught students to write in response to a prompt. In Rory's class, the following chart she created with her students demonstrates the strategies students were expected to use for the first part of the test on revising and editing (Field Notes, Rory, 02/03/11).

Read passage as a reader

- *Keep eyes open for "weird stuff"*
    - *Spelling, complete sentences, punctuation*
- *Keep ears open*
    - *Sounds weird*
    - *Sentences that don't fit*

In addition to teaching students to look for "weird stuff" in the passages, the 4th grade teachers worked on individual writing skills (e.g., combining sentences) by looking at examples from text read aloud in class (picture books and chapter books) as well as by looking at test preparation materials.

Needing to write to a prompt (e.g., "write about a time you were surprised") offered other challenges. When looking at benchmark data, teachers noticed that while many students composed a narrative, they did not answer the prompt (Field Notes, 4th Grade Meeting, 01/27/11). In terms of testing, not answering the prompt results in an automatic failing grade.

A test taking strategy that was unique to the writing test involved conferring with

individual students about their writing. After the 4th grade students took the TAKS release test for writing, Sasha spent class time conferring with her students individually. The following is an excerpt from a writing conference she had with a student.

> So you wrote about your brother and you being like a pair of socks and you were able to keep that connection through the whole story. And say sometimes one gets lost but they find each other and come back. I thought that was a smart way of talking about you and your brother. When you fight it's like a pair of socks getting separated. I thought that was a really creative way of talking about a person. I think we could focus on…little things to work on like verb tenses. So when you say things like, "today I got the ball, yesterday I will catch the ball," being able to work on those together. Those are little things we can catch pretty easily… The only thing I feel we could have changed. You put "and my brother is my special person." You really put a lot of focus on the person and I know we just worked on a special person. This time it's something that's special. I think it would have been good to come to that like my brother is like my special sock. If this had been TAKS I would have given you a 2, that's good and still passing. But at the end, relate it back to what they want you to write about. Seems like you are kind of stuck in the beginning. (Field Notes, Sasha, 01/26/11)

The conference began as a way of responding to the content of the student's writing in a way that highlighted what Sasha liked, then addressed a teaching concern, followed by information related to testing. She also told him the score he would have received had this been the actual TAKS test. Giving students scores like the ones used on TAKS was a

common practice among 4th grade teachers to track their progress and let students know how they were doing. This approach to teaching writing was specific to the task students were presented with—writing to a prompt.

Assessments

A common approach to support test preparation involved the use of assessments, which required a large amount of instruction and planning for instruction. Formative assessments were used at all grade levels to keep track of student progress. One type of formative assessment that all grade levels were expected to create, administer, and analyze together as part of a team were common assessments. Common assessments were pushed for by both the district and administration, with the notion that common assessments are an important way to inform teaching. For the most part, teachers were expected to administer common assessments each week for all subject areas. Occasionally teachers felt weekly assessments got in the way of instruction, so they were sometimes given every other week rather than every week. To help stress the importance of common assessments and to support teachers in their use of them, the instructional team devoted an entire staff development day to common assessments. The first part of the meeting took place with the entire school and consisted of finding out teachers' understandings about common assessments, reading an article about common assessments, and receiving a power point lecture about common assessments. The rest of the day was spent working in teams with coaches to create common assessments.

> Administration has asked us to make common assessments a top priority. There was a district wide staff development day where we spent the whole day on common

> assessments. "We're supposed to do that…We have to show in our meetings that we agree and do the same assessment. So we try to do that" (Carl, Final Interview). Carl's description of common assessments reflects his grade level's compliance with the school's expectation and the clear understanding that the requirement comes from administration.

For the intermediate grades, common assessments were aligned with the TAKS test. They resembled the TAKS test through the use of multiple choice questions written using the same sentences stems found on the TAKS test (e.g., "The reader can tell that…" or "In paragraph 6, the main idea is…"). The reading material varied from passages that resembled TAKS passages that students were expected to read on their own to stories read aloud by the teacher either in the basal or from a picture book. The common assessments usually only tested one skill at a time (e.g., word meaning) depending on what was taught during the week. The closer the TAKS testing dates drew near, the more these assessments tested for multiple skills. They were created either by the teachers as a team or by the literacy coach who then shared them with the team. Regardless of the number of skills and objectives tested, they were chosen based on what was going to be tested on TAKS.

Benchmark and TAKS release tests.

One form of TAKS practice tests used at Brazos Elementary was benchmark tests. Benchmark tests were created at the district level, and all schools in the district were expected to administer in December. By having all schools in the district take the same assessment at the same time, they were able to rank schools according to student progress

on these tests that resembled the state TAKS test. There were also benchmark tests available at the beginning and end of the school year. The beginning of the year benchmark was not given at Brazos Elementary, as the literacy coach and teachers decided they did not wish to administer it like they had in the years past. A large reason for this decision was based on the success the school experienced the previous year, with the feeling that they did not need to begin the school year so rigidly with testing. For Paula, this was not necessarily a good thing.

> At first we were so excited because one less test, but when we got to the MOY [middle of the year test] we couldn't see any growth, which we were used to seeing. If we had it to do over we would do the BOY [beginning of the year test]. (Paula, Final Interview)

Paula's opinion was that the middle of the year benchmark was difficult to evaluate when they did not have another test to compare it to from the beginning of the year. The end of the year benchmark test was also not required by the district, since the outcome on the TAKS test was representative of what they were looking for.

At the same time, the data from the benchmark tests also meant that some students who tested in English were then designated to test in Spanish if their scores were not high enough.

> Sometimes the choice of language instruction changes mid-year because they [students] didn't do so well in the middle of the year benchmark or TAKS. I feel like doing that for a student, we're too scared to be like, you know they're probably not going to do so well in 3rd grade on the TAKS but they might be stronger in 4th

> grade. And what are we doing to that kids' sense of self when we're saying, 'well we chose to do this but you're not doing so well so we're going to switch you back.' Sometimes choices like that, shouldn't we take the risk and if the district comes in and looks at us, then they look at us. But can't we stand behind our kids and say we believe they are going to do better? Sometimes you scrape your knees learning. (Celestina Final Interview)

Celestina expressed her frustration with how students' language of testing was based solely on the expectation for passing grades, rather than allowing students to develop at their own pace. The decisions administration made about the language of testing in response to how students progressed on practice tests illustrates the pressures they felt to attain as many passing scores as they could, regardless of how teachers or students felt about their learning.

Rolando, a bilingual 5th grade teacher, also expressed frustration with the use of benchmark testing.

> My major disappointment was when the results of the benchmark testing were low, a barrage of interventionists began to appear and pull out students so as to 'help them' become better readers. One of the young ladies in class asked, 'Mr. Ramirez, are we the dumb class?' I asked her 'Why are you asking this?' She replied, 'Because there are so many adults taking out so many students from our class.' I was mesmerized because in my opinion, I felt that there were too many 'chiefs' attempting to desperately teach to the test. (Rolando, Final Interview)

Rolando's comment reflects the ways in which students were affected by testing and how

they may have internalized understandings about what it meant to receive interventions.

Teachers were allotted extra planning time to focus on the results of benchmark tests during sessions they called "data days." These provided time for teachers to analyze the test items and students' responses, which also helped teachers know which skills their students needed help with. This often consisted of teachers turning to the literacy coach to seek clarification about test items and the skills being tested. While looking at writing test scores with 4th grade, Gina posted a chart for the group that read "Revising and Editing." This was the portion of the test that consisted of multiple-choice questions about what to revise or edit in a written passage. Gina asked the teachers to first focus on needs for the grade level and then for individual classes. (Field Notes, Meeting, 01/27/11)

Similar to the benchmark tests, TAKS release tests were copies of tests used in past years that the state made available to the public. The schools in the district used these tests like the middle of the year benchmark tests, but they were given a few weeks before the TAKS test. Because these tests were created by the state agency, unlike the benchmark tests, which were created by the district, they were valued as being very good predictors of how students might perform on the TAKS test. The proximity with which they were given before the test also helped teachers feel confident about their students' performance as an indication of how they would do on TAKS. At the same time, having a few weeks in between the two assessments also left room for additional interventions. Once the release tests were given, teachers were then given another "data day" like the one in December to look at their student data again and make plans accordingly. Just as teachers were required to make changes to their literacy instruction to accommodate test

preparation, they also made changes in the way of allowing more time for assessments and more time to be out of their classrooms so they could focus on planning for test preparation.

In the next excerpt, June, a bilingual 4th grade teacher, talked about how she felt conflicted by the data produced from student test scores. The data she referred to was the scores on benchmark and release tests.

> Honestly, the data makes me feel disappointed in myself, like I haven't been working hard enough to raise or even reach my student's academic capabilities. But then I remember that we're attempting to measure human beings against a generic, standardized measure. I think standards are necessary, yes, but I think it's a lot more complicated in education, because there are many subjective, individualized components that come into play when dealing with people. Looking at the data is eye opening but we take it too far, letting it completely dictate the decisions we make in our planning for the semester. I don't know if there is a better way, though, because this way of doing it is all I've seen in terms of planning. But the more we do it this way, the more uncomfortable it feels for me, like we're really missing something. We only talk about the data. The academic competencies. But as teachers we do so much more than teach. What about all the other things that comprise development? Where is the analysis of everything else that is going on in these kids' lives? How hard growing up in and of itself is? How poverty and segregation affects academic and social development? How governing bodies are so blinded by statistics on tests, failing

> to see the bigger picture? Or do they in fact recognize the big picture but want to keep *us* distracted? (June, Mid-year Interview)

June's description challenged the myopic approach to thinking about education only in terms of test scores and questioned the lack of acknowledging other types of growth in education. She also recognized the difficulties she had in exclusively using student data to make decisions when she saw her students as much more than their test scores. In the last part, she asked, "Or do they in fact recognize the big picture but want to keep *us* distracted?" Her use of the term "they" seems to refer to "the governing bodies" she mentioned in sentence before. Here she sees teaching as being directed by outsiders who have the power. She questioned whether those making the decisions in the larger system did not realize there was more to education, or if they did but wanted to keep teachers from also recognizing it. This suggests June saw teaching as externally controlled, and as having the ability to be oppressive and limiting.

Gina understood that benchmark and release test scores were a way for the district to monitor the school. For her, higher test scores meant less intervention from the district, while lower the test scores meant more intervention. This alone was incentive to help teachers increase student test scores, but for Gina it was important to do this in a way that still relied on "best practices."

> Then I feel like we have even more leverage to say, 'this is what we're doing, this is why we're doing it,' even though we still have to do some things we don't love or don't agree with when it comes to preparation for those tests… Then of course I always use that to argue my point for things like readers workshop. Look at what

> we're doing and look at the gains we're seeing. We're getting better and better at things like that. (Gina, Final Interview)

In this quote, Gina expressed the tension she felt between doing what she believed in versus focusing on the test. She saw doing well on the TAKS test as a way of proving to the district they could perform well while still teaching in ways she supported, such as using readers workshop. She recognized growth the school made in test scores while also working on improving practices. It was important for Gina to receive as little intervention from the district as possible so the school could operate more autonomously than schools with lower test scores.

Tension with High-stakes Testing and Test Preparation

As the term "high-stakes" testing suggests, teachers understood the emphasis placed on test scores at the district and school level for accountability measures used by the state. This left teachers feeling that test scores were more important than anything else. Across the board, whether teaching Pre-Kindergarten or 5th grade, teachers generally disagreed with high-stakes testing. The tensions they felt with high-stakes testing related to conflicts with their own philosophies and beliefs about teaching and learning. Other tensions they experienced related to their compliance with or resistance to expectations about literacy teaching, as well as how their view of success differed from what they perceived was the notion of success related with high-stakes testing.

Conflicts between beliefs and practices.

One struggle many teachers expressed related to how they felt divided between what they believed in versus what they actually did on a daily basis. While their beliefs

may have prompted them to want to teach in certain ways, their practices were guided by the immediate concerns to respond to testing. For example, Sasha recognized testing as a necessary part of how she was expected to teach.

> It's always that double-edged sword—what you came into education for and what's in your heart versus I have to do these things because it's part of the way it works…But then there's that big part of teaching, in at least the secondary level, is TAKS. So being able to see that kids are improving, that they're not being stagnate and they do understand this is a test, these are things that I have to do during test time. I don't think those tests really measure their intelligence but it is part of the system and you can't change it right now. I don't have the power to do that. (Sasha, Final Interview)

In this quote, Sasha expressed her disagreement with testing and saw it as part of something larger than herself that she did not have power over to change. Rather than resist testing, she taught in ways that supported test taking, even though she did not believe in it. She referred to "the system" to describe the way the educational system is regulated and controlled through standardization measures.

Gina also felt compromised between her own beliefs about teaching and what she actually had to do.

> And that I still live in that world that I lived in as a teacher where I have to do some things that I don't whole heartedly agree with because of the system that we work within. Like I'm not doing kids any good, if I just say that I don't agree with TAKS and it's not a good measure of what kids know and therefore I'm not going

> to support teachers and kids and success on that. I'm not doing a disservice to anyone but the teachers and the kids, and so that time of year is really tough for me right before testing, February and March, and it's really tough on the teachers and I just had to keep reminding them, I'm right there with you. (Gina, Final Interview)

Being in the position of literacy coach, Gina had to advocate for and ensure teachers were using practices in-line with test taking even though she disagreed with the testing system overall and the test preparation that went along with it. She highlights a struggle many teachers had between not believing in testing but knowing that it was important to prepare students for the test regardless of their own beliefs, because having students not pass the test was more damaging than teaching in ways they disagreed with.

Whitney, one of the reading specialists, also felt her beliefs about teaching were infringed upon with relation to the way test scores presided over all other information about students. She struggled with wanting to provide literacy instruction centered on students' needs (such as using the language experience approach) while being expected by the district to support students with test preparation in small groups.

> You want the progress you've seen to transfer no matter what it is, to their personal reading and their reading in the classroom, and you also want to see it transfer to test taking because sadly that's what the kids are judged on and sadly that's what we get judged on too. It's hard when you know that even if you have felt like you are doing the best thing for these kids, and you've seen their reading

> increase, and you've seen their self-confidence increase, and then they take this test [benchmark test], and they're making 30s and 40s. (Whitney, First Interview)

For Whitney, test scores may not have reflected all the growth a child made because test scores do not show all aspects of a reading life. Her view of literacy encompassed multiple purposes for reading (personal reading and other classroom reading) outside of reading for the purpose of test taking. The practice she was called upon to enact (test preparation), however, did not encompass this broader notion of literacy. Whitney also addressed an issue most teachers felt of feeling judged by students' test scores.

Tension with how testing influenced literacy practices.

In response to teaching to the test, which tests specific skills, teachers adopted the practice of teaching reading skill by skill. Teachers experienced tension with this way of teaching that represents literacy as discrete skills in isolation (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). For Rory, teaching in this way brought up questions about what exactly they were preparing students for and the pacing of instruction.

> There has to be something more meaningful than author's purpose and connecting across texts. We do that already. Why do I have to plow so hard through them? I feel like my intention has literally been to get these answers out of them, specific sorts of answers. And fit them in these boxes. I know that is of course important for these skills and things we have to do. I don't want to do those. (Rory, Mid-year Interview)

Rory felt conflicted with having to teach in a way that supported testing and suggested there is only one way to interpret or understand a text, as there is only one right answer.

This highlights the narrow view of literacy commonly found in schools where literacy is reduced to skills and right answers.

Street (1995) argues that literacy can be understood in terms of structures of power and specific cultural meanings and practices. From this perspective, test preparation as literacy practices can be understood as the product of a larger structure that seeks to control school practices. The strict, narrow accountability measures enacted by test-dependent policies create inequitable conditions for schools like Brazos Elementary that have historically performed low on standardization measures. One way this inequality is manifested is in the way teachers limit their teaching to tested objectives (Shepard, 1990). For Paula, test preparation meant being told what to teach.

> The literature block is pretty much dictated by TAKS. It's all focused on that. It's not really anything we have control over. It's whatever we're supposed to be teaching with TAKS and it's the strategies we teach for TAKS. So there's very little lead way to do anything else than what we're told. When we do the planning, we all do the same things. Basically learning how to tackle different kinds of questions for different criteria. (Paula, Final Interview)

Paula felt testing dictated her teaching and she did not feel like she had control over her own teaching. For her, literacy teaching meant teaching to the test.

Arturo had similar feelings about test preparation limiting literacy teaching.

> I think sometimes with the TAKS we get limited in your approach to reading. Sometimes you get limited, but sometimes it is good because you have a frame so you are not just teaching anything and everything. But sometimes you feel that

> you are very limited because you try to create a different unit and they say no, we need to be on this. These are the standards; these are the TEKS that we need to teach, so we cannot teach something different. So in some ways they affect you, you cannot teach something else. But it means you have a frame and if your students are able to do that and this is what is required for them then that's good. At least they know something. At least they are meeting the standard. And later maybe at the end of the year you can incorporate more, but I think sometimes you are really limited in what you have to teach. Sometimes I feel that way and my colleagues feel that same way. (Arturo, Final Interview)

While testing made Arturo feel limited in his teaching, he also recognized there might be some positive aspects to testing in terms of the frame it provided for what to teach. He also recognized that when testing was finished for the school year, there might be more room to try other practices once the pressure of testing was gone.

For Evelyn, a 3rd grade teacher, the ways in which test preparation reduced her teaching made her feel that she was not being purposeful in her practices.

> It's kind of hard right now because we're getting ready for TAKS and it feels like all purpose is gone. I'm not sure how to overcome this one month before TAKS and what to do with that time. It seems like there's no time to do the purposeful learning during this time because it's just all TAKS prep. (Evelyn, Final Interview)

Evelyn felt like her teaching all came down to preparing for TAKS with the sole purpose of teaching relating to getting her students to perform well on the test.

The limits placed on teaching meant some teachers had to omit some components of their literacy teaching to accommodate test preparation. For Leah, a 4th grade teacher, this meant omitting guided reading and book study, two practices she valued but because they were not tied to test preparation, had to be taken out of her literacy block (Leah, Final Interview). June also felt her small group reading time was challenged because of test preparation.

> The bad thing is the small groups have been TAKS focused. So instead of picking leveled books, it's working on the same TAKS model, revisiting them. So it's been draining. I haven't had a good experience with it. It still feels really tired and boring to me. Maybe that's something else to focus on after TAKS, doing a genuine group. (June, Final Interview)

Like Arturo also expressed earlier, June looked ahead to the time after testing when she might return to the teaching practices she valued. Her guided reading time, characterized by the use of texts on students' instructional levels, was replaced with doing test preparation with smaller groups of students, but with no differentiation between the reading level of materials used for each group. This is another example of how high-stakes testing worked to create inequitable conditions for students who were denied the opportunity to receive support appropriate to their instructional needs, but were forced into the "one-size-fits-all" of standardized accountability (Au & Raphael, 2000).

Some teachers recognized the divide between test preparation as a form of literacy and "real world reading." This source of tension stemmed from the belief that the reading required on a TAKS test was not the same as the reading one engages in when reading

other materials.

> There's 'real world' reading and there's TAKS reading. I'm definitely going to try and keep a balance on both because they are both important. When I pull small groups from now on it's going to be largely based on TAKS but still, what do I need to do as a reader, what's the first thing I do? There's going to be a balance, but weighted more towards hitting those strategies for understanding main idea and summarizing something.
>
> (Erin, First Interview)

Erin saw test preparation as a distinct approach to reading, but still relied on teaching individual skills as a way of covering test preparation. She serves as an example of the ways in which test preparation permeated literacy instruction, even when teachers had other beliefs about literacy practices. This supports the findings of other studies that show how high-stakes accountability provides external control over teaching (Moe, 2003) and that teachers' negative views of standardized tests do not preclude them from spending large amounts of time preparing students for them (Hoffman et al. 2001).

As Valli et al. (2008) found in a study of the effects of standardized testing on elementary schools, Brazos Elementary responded to testing pressures by grouping students by ability. Students who performed well on benchmark and release tests were also grouped together, but test preparation was still a large part of their daily instruction. This was problematic for some teachers, like Celestina, who believed those students should be allowed to engage in more meaningful literacy practices such as inquiry projects and book clubs. "Isn't this a time to kind of reward them and keep them

interested in reading? Instead of doing this two days and then another two days. So they are still doing TAKS" (Celestina, Final Interview). Celestina did not agree with this approach of drilling all students regardless of their progress, and saw this as a missed opportunity to keep them interested in reading. This is another example of how the literacy instruction students received was reduced to controlled measures and students were subject to remedial literacy practices rather than student-centered practices, even when students consistently scored well on practice tests.

Concerns for how testing affected students.

Another tension teachers expressed related to their concern for what testing did to their students. Teachers recognized that testing and test preparation was difficult on students.

> Some of them, they make themselves sick with the stress them put on themselves. I've seen kids throw up. I've had kids get sick. I have another view of TAKS. I think teachers need accountability and kids need some type of assessment so we can look at that, but I don't think it all needs to be on this one test. That's all these teachers do is teach to the test because they can't teach them anything else. (Sharon, Final Interview)

Sharon was a Pre-Kindergarten teacher but had experience working in different capacities at Brazos Elementary over a 26-year span. From her point of view, teachers had to teach to the test and were not able to teach in other ways.

Other ways teachers described testing and test preparation as affecting students related to their disinterest in reading and recognition that they were preparing for the test

at the expense of reading books. Elena, a reading specialist, described the students she worked with as asking, "when are we going to get to read those books?" (Elena, Final Interview) as they opened their photocopied packet of reading passages. The books they were referring to were the trade books lining the shelves of the small office space where she worked with small groups.

Celestina felt like her students were disengaged. "I feel like I am losing them a little bit in reading but that's because we're doing something they don't like. They don't like doing TAKS passages all the time. Neither do it. I feel like the engagement level is different" (Celestina, Final Interview). Elena and Celestina's comments reflect the effect test preparation had on students as teachers made changes in the curriculum to teach to the test and use materials that resembled the test (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985).

Defining success.

Another source of tension teachers had with testing related to success. When asked to define success, teachers recognized they had more than one view of success—their own personal view of success and a definition of success that was associated with test scores. Viewing success as a binary between their own beliefs and as part of a larger system was a source of tension, as teachers felt conflicted and negotiated between the two.

> There are so many factors that come into play and I think right now for people who don't know your campus or don't know how we work and don't know the type of teachers that we have here, they look at us and they see our scores and that's the reality. I mean, that's our reality. Being on the east side and being a

> campus as big as we are, they're not looking at how many kids have improved, they're looking at the bottom line and it's the numbers. I think right now, I think that's where just education in general is right now, in our state especially, I think to me I don't define our school by the scores, although that is our reality. (Lucia, Final Interview)

In this quote, Lucia, the principal, acknowledged the role test scores played in how others judged the school even if this was not how she defined success for the school. Lucia saw a focus on test scores as being a part of a larger discourse about education that characterizes school success by test scores above all other measures and indicators (Brandt, 2007).

Most teachers recognized the importance of seeing progress students made in other ways, but also understood that test scores were the ultimate indicator of the school's success. All teachers, whether teaching primary or intermediate grades, recognized the importance of test scores in reflecting on the school. David, a bilingual 1st grade teacher, described success as such:

> At a minimal level it's that we pass the TAKS test. That's the way the school is judged. It's the way the administration is rated. That has to be a minimum level of success, and anything we do beyond that is gravy. (David, Final Interview)

Because so much was at stake with the test scores, David saw making progress on TAKS as the minimal level of what success meant and how it was recognized.

Sharon described the ways in which the school was judged by test scores.

> It's a shame to say. I feel like that. I think every teacher here has that same feeling

> I do. They know, they have kids that are succeeding in their classrooms and they know that they're doing a good job. It may not show on TAKS but the bad thing and the sad thing is that's what everybody else looks at. It's mainly like the public, and the district, and the principal, and they have to. They don't have a choice. Their hands are tied. That's the sad thing. (Sharon, Final Interview)

While her Pre-Kindergarten students' did not participate in the state testing, she understood the importance of the test scores in determining the entire school's status and ranking.

One teacher who was especially conflicted by having two different perspectives on success was Celestina.

> I think we have two different kinds of dialogue. Honestly, innately inside most of us, as teachers, we want our kids to be critical thinkers, to be creative, to chat with each other and have these exploratory ways of learning. I think we want that. Then at some point, like right now, you get this pressure that it's got to be data driven, we've gotten to have these results. I think we have two different things that we want them to be successful but they haven't matched up yet. (Celestina, Final Interview)

Knowing what she wanted her students to achieve but also being held accountable by the state test was something she battled with all year long. High-stakes testing challenged teaching in ways that resisted the normative practices of test preparation. In the beginning the school year, she thought back to her previous two years of teaching 3rd grade and how her students performed on the state test.

> My first year I had 100% passing TAKS and last year I had 95% passing. You would think I was a less successful teacher that second year, but I really feel that second year was my best year. Those kids came out more independent and critical thinkers when it comes to reading and the conversations they have about reading than my first year. Data wise you would think oh she was great her first year, what happened her second year? I am proud of all my students. But based on the literature practices that were done, those kids that second year were way more successful. What was happening with them as thinkers last year surpasses any getting 100% in TAKS. (Celestina, First Interview)

Celestina's understanding of where her students were in their literacy development superseded their test scores in terms of how she viewed success. She saw that passing the TAKS test did not equate being successful learners and having the kinds of literate practices she valued.

While testing dominated so much of how teachers thought about their teaching and their students, teachers had many other ways they defined success independently of testing. For Sasha, success related to her students' desire to learn.

> I think that personally when I see that students are engaged and have a desire to learn and they want to know why and they don't necessarily wait for someone to tell them, but are curious and go out to find out themselves or start to probing. And when they're independent and can take all the tools that I've given them or shown them and can use them on their own and can really make something out of it instead of regurgitating... But I think that if I can ignite the fire for them to want

> to be learners and to have a desire to find something that they're passionate about, then that will really set other things ablaze, because they want to be. I think when they realize that they are successful at something then they know they can do it with other things even though it was a struggle. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Sasha was concerned with her students' motivation to learn and ability to inquire into what they were interested in using the tools she gave them to learn on their own. She saw success as being based on individual levels rather on standardized levels.

June defined success in terms of her relationship with her students.

> Myself, I define success as if my kids trust me and I can tell that they trust me. And that they realize that I'm their ally. I'm their advocate. I really want the best for them. I try to understand what they're going through, what it's like to be a kid. What it's like to be a kid in Elm Creek. Just how cruddy the world is now, politically and economically. So I just hope that they can go home at night after school and just feel like I'm in their corner and they can trust me and I genuinely appreciate them…So if I can be a positive person in their life I think I've been successful. (June, Final Interview)

In this quote June defined success for herself and how that view of success related to her students. Her desire to be an advocate for her students was based on her personal view of teaching rather than on what students were expected to know or be able to do.

Conclusion

This chapter took up the question: *At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff*

members respond to them? The data suggested that high-stakes testing dominated literacy teaching practices at Brazos Elementary in ways similar to what other researchers have found at low income schools (Apple, 2002; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Madaus, 1988). In the current high-stakes context, literacy instruction runs the risk of being narrowly defined and literacy learning is often measured according to students' performance on standardized assessments (Rangel, 2009). These patterns lead to students and teachers experiencing a model of literacy that does not take into account multiple ways or purposes for reading and writing.

Despite a general consensus among teachers that teaching to the test was not ideal for their own beliefs or for their students, teachers understood the importance of raising test scores, and thus complied with test preparation. The resulting literacy practices were a reflection of the larger system of standardization instilled by test-dependent policies in which literacy practices are reduced to disconnected skills in isolation without clear connections to meaningful uses of literacy. The ways in which test preparation infiltrated the daily life of the classroom could be seen in how teachers organized their schedules to accommodate test preparation and in the ways they taught students to take tests—with particular attention paid to the language used in the test, strategies for taking the test, and using materials that resembled the test. Assessments also reflected the emphasis placed on test preparation as they were regularly used to track student progress and make decisions about instruction and grouping students.

This chapter contributes to our understanding of what teachers experience as part of the test taking process. Teachers do not participate at the policy level in making

decisions about school reform or high-stakes testing, yet they are the part of the larger system that is responsible for administering these tests, and preparing students for them. The lack of input provided by teachers about decision making as well as the expectations placed on them to raise test scores positions them in such a way that does not recognize them as professionals. While they play the largest role in educating students, they are situated as only a small part of a larger system where getting things done does not necessarily mirror what teachers might recognize as best practices.

In terms of literacy instruction, the prominence of test preparation replaces meaningful practices with practices of organization, management, and transmission. Rather than being a teacher of literacy, teachers are forced to take up other tasks such as organizing their schedules to accommodate test preparation, teaching test taking strategies, and giving assessments. The outcome is that instruction is responsive to students' testing data, rather than their individual literacy interests or strengths. The resulting messages have negative consequences for students in low-income schools where educational experiences run the risk of being limited because of the ways in which schools anticipate high-stakes accountability.

CHAPTER 6: "GROWING THE GOOD STUFF": CRAFTING THEORETICALLY DEFENSIBLE LITERACY TEACHING WHILE SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH TEST PREPARATION

This chapter addresses the question: *In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?* The findings focus on the ways in which teachers acted in agentive ways to make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs about literacy teaching while still supporting students with test preparation. First, I begin with an explanation of how the literacy coach acted in agentive ways that supported teachers in doing the same. Then I explore specific aspects of teachers' practices that are examples of how they were active agents in this context, including their choice of children's books and participating in conference presentations. These were ways of creating literacy teaching practices that were theoretically compatible with the teachers' beliefs but that still supported the instructional practices associated with a high-stakes testing environment.

I drew on my analysis of field notes of classroom observations and meetings along with interview transcripts and photographs to construct this chapter, highlighting findings related to the teaching practices that existed in spite of the strong focus on testing and test preparation presented in Chapter 5. The teachers' voices I represent in this chapter were a purposive sample of nine participants who exhibited these practices. I did not intentionally collect more data in their classrooms or conduct additional interviews of these teachers (with the exception of three teachers who were focus

teachers—Gina, Rory, and Arturo), but rather my analysis of teaching practices across the full data set led to the themes discussed in this chapter.

When teachers experienced tensions as they made decisions about their literacy teaching, they sometimes made reconciliations in the ways they taught to bridge the expectation to teach to the test with teaching in ways they supported. In this way, teachers constructed their own responses to accountability measures that showed how they acted as active agents in order to produce self-authored actions, actions that represented their own interests and decision-making (Holland et al., 1998). Rather than passively assume the responsibilities placed on them to prepare students for standardized testing, the teachers' agency acted as a form of resistance where they positioned themselves in ways that allowed for a new way of being and making decisions in this context (Lewis et al., 2007). By examining teacher agency, teachers' actions can be understood in terms of how they do things together with the cultural tools available to them (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The agency teachers exhibited at Brazos Elementary shaped and was shaped by the context of reform efforts that supported high-stakes testing (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehen, 2002).

In the previous two chapters I showed the conditions created at the school and classroom level as schools interpret the accountability conditions created by test-dependent policies at the national and state level. In this chapter, I show an alternative interpretation and response to these conditions shaped by a small group of teachers. The teachers represented in this chapter, while only a minority of the teachers at Brazos Elementary, make important contributions to our understanding of what it means to teach

under the umbrella of high-stakes testing. While we know plenty about how teachers feel negatively towards the pressure to improve test scores (Moore, 1994), and the kinds of practices they adopt to support testing like limiting teaching to tested objectives (Shepard, 1990) and using materials that resemble the test (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985), we know less about how teachers counter the negative aspects of testing through their practices.

Despite the testing culture of the school that was created from factors such as giving priority to the intermediate grades to the materials used to the valued test preparation practices, some teachers developed their own set of answers about teaching that reflected their beliefs about quality literacy teaching. The actions of these teachers can be characterized as creative compliance. They found a way to work within a system where test preparation was expected while making choices that they believed supported their students' literacy learning and their own integrity as professionals. The alternative practices they developed were not as acquiescent to the testing culture as some of the oppressive practices created and intended for preparing students for high-stakes tests.

The narrowing of the curriculum and reduction of literacy practices to isolated skills not only creates unfair conditions for students, but also for teachers whose preparation and professional identities are challenged and hardly acknowledged. These teachers provide a look at how agentive decision-making can change one's experience of teaching in a high-stakes environment. An agentive stance is especially important as the profession is continually encroached upon because of the demands created by test-dependent policies at the national and state level (Cuban, 1998).

The Literacy Coach: A Major Support for Literacy Teaching

One of the most important tools teachers had to act with agency was the support of the literacy coach. Coming from a strong background in literacy teaching, Gina recognized when the sanctioned literacy practices of the school were in conflict with her beliefs about literacy teaching. Gina's experience and active role in promoting literacy practices helped other teachers make decisions that reflected a stance towards teaching literacy that tried in some ways to combat the controlled nature of literacy for test preparation.

Gina had nine years of teaching experience and came from a strong teacher preparation program that was literacy focused. Additionally, she had a masters degree with a concentration in reading instruction, held advanced certifications in reading teaching, and was certified by the National Board. She had strong ideas about literacy teaching with a vision for how she wanted the literacy program to be at Brazos Elementary. Like most teachers, she did not always agree with the role high-stakes testing played in making day-to-day decisions, but cooperated with most reform efforts. In turn, she was especially influential in helping teachers make negotiations to allow their literacy teaching to be as theoretically sound with "best practices" as was possible.

> I've always been an advocate for teachers and I try to speak from what I feel like is best for them because I feel like there's a lot of stuff happening in schools that's not any good for them or for kids for that matter. (Gina, Final Interview)

Being able to work in favor of the teachers and promote what she thought was best for them and their students was important to Gina. She viewed her role as not only

supporting teachers in their own learning and teaching, but as a way of upholding the beliefs she had about literacy teaching when she fought from reducing instruction to only test preparation. In turn, many teachers saw her as a "very strong advocate for literacy" (June, First Interview). She lived in a theoretically important space where she helped teachers put in place theories and practices for ideal literacy teaching that were consistent with her beliefs. She helped teachers navigate the space between theory, practice, and testing while creating ways of teaching that were maximally as sound as they could be in this context.

In the following quote, Gina demonstrated how she sometimes struggled with her role as literacy coach.

> Rory helped me think about it because she said something about you help us find our teacher voice. You help us figure out who we are as teachers. Part of that is taking what comes from the state, from the district, from a mandate, and figuring out how to work around it or use what you can and leave the rest. Or how to get the job done without making waves that are going to be harmful for you or the kids in the long run. It was helpful when she said that the other day because I thought, "that's the part of the job that I struggle with the most, being that in the middle person and sometimes having to say here's this, let's talk about these curriculum road maps." When I know that when I taught, I didn't use them. But it's all about balance and as long as we work in a system that's set up this way, we have to, we're going to have to learn to juggle that stuff and the good stuff and hopefully over time all the good stuff will keep growing. (Gina, Final Interview)

Gina described her role as mediating between district expectations and "the good stuff." She viewed teaching as part of a larger "system" where her job was to bring in more of the good stuff while not drawing too much attention, or as she put it, without "making waves." Gina exhibited agency in the ways she responded to testing pressures and job expectations. Her interpretations of how to use the tools made available to her, such as the curriculum road maps, shows how she worked within this context from the stance of someone who was not only acted upon, but also acted in response to the given situation.

One way Gina supported teachers in an effort to incorporate "the good stuff" related to classroom organization, in particular, the use of reading and writing workshops to structure the language arts time and the organization of classroom libraries. Gina helped teachers implement reading and writing workshops in classrooms by providing them with information and by modeling how to conduct mini-lessons and talk to students about their reading and writing. For example, Celestina invited Gina to her class at the beginning of the semester to help her get her reading workshop going. Celestina struggled with getting her students to read independently during reading workshop without talking. Gina observed Celestina's students and then came back the next day to talk with them about how reading in their special spots during reading workshop went. The students described the experience as "bad because students were talking." Gina then asked the students to think with her about what they could do differently. Afterwards, Gina gave some procedural instructions about getting bags with books and choosing books from the classroom library. When students were released to read independently, Gina modeled having reading conferences with students for Celestina while taking notes in her

notebook (Field Notes, 08/31/10).

Gina also supported teachers with reading workshop by helping them organize and stock their classroom libraries so students would have a selection to choose from for their independent reading time.

> Before school even started we set up her [referring to a 2nd grade teacher] library which she really wanted to level, to organize by levels, the whole thing, and so I pushed against that and I said what about topics and genres and things like that so kids can find what they're interested in? So we sat for hours and hours and sorted books and made piles. (Gina, Final Interview)

This quote is an example of how Gina worked alongside teachers to support them with their classroom libraries and how she believed books should be organized by topics and genres rather than by text levels. Sorting books by topics and genres supports reader's interests (Collins, 2008) over the use of text levels to match readers to books based on their instructional and independent reading levels (Fountas & Pinnel, 1996).

An aspect of Gina's position that was also one of her favorite parts was the creation of teacher inquiry groups (Field Notes, 10/15/10). Throughout the school year, Gina created various opportunities for teachers to learn with her through study groups that were focused on different topics, such as reading workshop or reading response notebooks. This involved setting a weekly or biweekly meeting time along with a professional book for everyone to read. The books were purchased for teachers from the school budget and later in the school year Gina wrote and received a grant from an outside source to purchase more professional books.

Gina based these meeting on what teachers were interested in learning about (Gina, Final Interview). These informal meetings served as an important way for Gina to help teachers act in agentive ways, despite the pressures they experienced. She knew her teachers well and used their questions to shape the learning opportunities she provided for them. Rather than approach their questions from a stance of knowing all the answers, Gina engaged in inquiry with them.

Over time, the same teachers tended to participate in these voluntary learning groups and they recognized each other as teachers who were interested in learning more to shape their practice. Rachel saw this group of about five or six teachers as being "the same as me and we kind of look to each other" (Rachel, Final Interview).

June described this group by saying,

> She [Gina] does early morning gatherings for like-minded teachers. It's open to everyone but the same crowd usually shows up. Just barely started going. We'll pick a book or just talk about professional development we want to go to. We might talk about gripes in the classroom. It ends up being supportive. We share materials and ideas. Help me so I don't feel alone. Gina always has interesting information to share, she's very in the loop. (June, Final Interview)

As June described, these meeting times became much more than a gathering to learn about a similar topic, but a strong source of support for teachers to make it through the school year when they felt discouraged.

Gina was aware of the division that may have been created by her close involvement with a certain group of teachers from their extra meetings.

> …with those teachers, who were initially, like, really jealous and talking to people about how much time I spent in certain rooms or whatever…so those dynamics have been… funny. Just the way that teachers come to changing practice or, you know, being open to changing practices, has been interesting for me, to watch. I mean really how teachers influence other teachers and how that affects my work with teachers really, like who will and won't interact with me is largely based on who else on their team does or doesn't work with me. You know? I mean, uhm, I'm just continually, you know, I really believe that teachers influence teachers more than anybody else does. (Gina, First Interview)

Here Gina recognized the ways in which teachers influenced each other, including how their influence may have encouraged others to participate in learning with her. She was also aware of how other teachers might have perceived of her working with some teachers but not others.

Even when Gina's job duties changed across the school year, the teacher inquiry groups were still an important aspect that she tried to sustain because of role it played in supporting teachers. Like Rachel and June, Gina recognized that participation usually consisted of the same teachers. While these teachers were not a formally recognized group, they appreciated each other's presence on campus and often looked to each other for innovative ideas as well as support. Consequently, the teachers who acted in the most agentive ways were also the teachers who participated in this group.

Teaching Testing Language and Strategies Through Authentic Reading Material

With so much pressure to prepare students for the high-stakes tests, teachers were

often expected to use materials that resembled the test, such as photocopied worksheets that contained reading passages and multiple-choice questions to prepare for the reading test. Despite this expectation from the district, many teachers continued to use children's literature during their language arts block. Gina supported and encouraged teachers to use "authentic literature," a term she used to describe high-quality children's literature, by helping teachers select and often providing them with books.

> I think text choice is another really important thing. And that's another thing that as a campus, I think we've grown so much better at and it's really exciting to watch teachers discover even new books that I haven't heard of that kids can really connect with and that really connect to other things they've been learning. (Gina, Final Interview)

Gina's push for careful selection of texts was apparent in the ways she spoke to teachers about text choices, how she supported them in selecting texts, and even in helping two 3rd grade teachers secure a $2,000 grant to buy culturally relevant children's literature for the campus.

One way Gina encouraged teachers to incorporate literature into their teaching included the development of literature units. These were units of study that usually lasted between one and two weeks with literature selected around a common theme or topic. For example, in helping the 3rd grade teachers select texts about heroes while also teaching word meaning, Gina brought a selection of books to the planning meeting for teachers to look through that included Martin's Big Words by Doreen Rappaport, When Miriam Sang by Pam Muñoz Ryan, Amelia and Eleanor by Pam Muñoz Ryan, and Harvesting

Hope by Kathleen Krull (Field Notes, 3rd grade meeting, 01/25/11). In describing the decision to base instruction off of units, one of the 3rd grade teachers said,

> What we decided to go off when doing literature units was things that we knew the kids are going to want to discuss because they are all into Martin Luther King, Jr. and these are topics they've known about. That's why we decided to do certain units. (Celestina, Final Interview)

By creating a unit based on students' interests, the teachers were being responsive to their students while also creating their own curriculum that challenged the reduction of literacy teaching to test-based practice materials.

Other examples in 4th and 5th grades included units on strong women, the Civil Rights Movement, child labor, and the Civil War. When Caitlyn felt her students were bogged down by topics that might have been depressing, she decided to incorporate other texts and topics into her teaching. At one point her students asked who the Olympic swimmer, Michael Phelps, was and Caitlyn responded by finding an article about him from a kid's magazine. She brought this article in so students could learn about him, while also teaching testing strategies (Field Notes, 10/19/10).

Leah described these decisions in relation to what teachers perceived their students as needing.

> A lot of girls have self-issues and look at a normal girl, okay you are wearing this today. Helped with boys too knowing where we came from. It was a way of saying, "you can speak your mind." Some of the girls who were quieter were able to speak out more and a lot of them wrote stories about being strong and I can do

> what I want, nobody has the right to tell me what I can and cannot do. With the Civil Rights Movement, it carried out the theme of being respectful and not judging people. I have kids say things like you don't know how that person is if you don't know that person. (Leah, Final Interview)

Again, these units of study serve as a reminder that while preparing students for high-stakes testing can be limiting, teachers were able to broaden their literacy teaching through practices that connected to student interests and needs. Working in ways that did not mirror test preparation was one way teachers demonstrated the agency they had to teach in more desirable ways.

As a supplement to the literature units, Gina introduced the teachers to language charts as a way of capturing talk and thinking about each book. These were large charts created on butcher paper that stretched across the length of a bulletin board. The original intention of language charts is to serve as an artifact of conversations classes have about books in order to explore multiple and varied responses to literature (Roser, Hoffman, Labbo, & Farest, 1992). Gina saw these as an opportunity to introduce and reinforce the language of the test to provide students with practice. Because these charts are organized around books with guiding questions, they are graphically distinct from multiple choice questions and worksheets.

Figure 1: Language chart on author's purpose and text organization

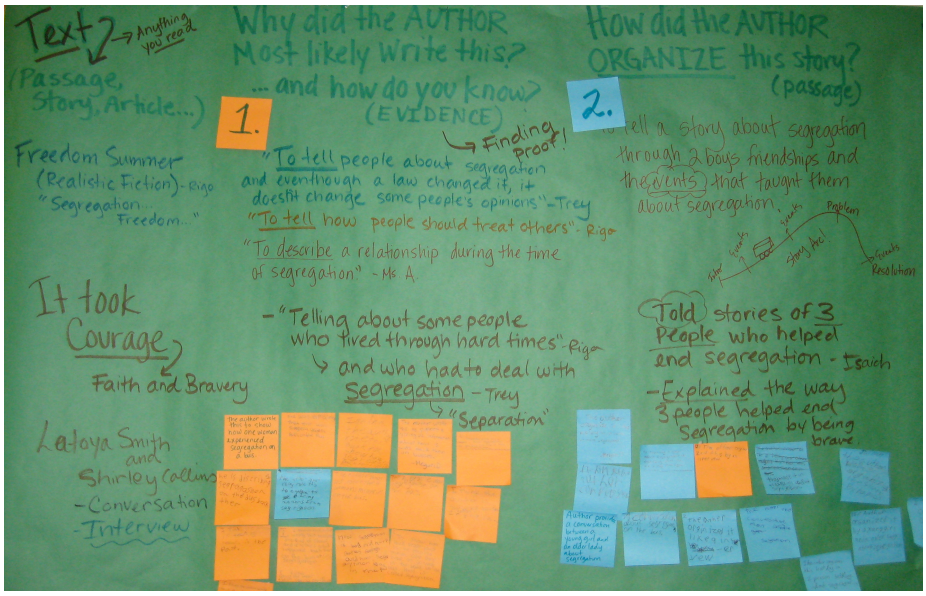


Figure 2: Language chart on cause and effect

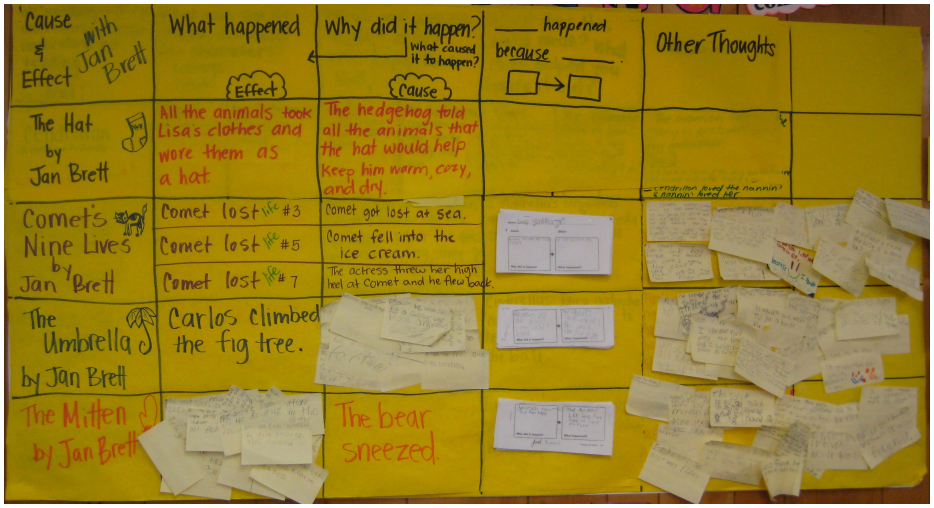


Figure 3: Language chart for connecting across texts

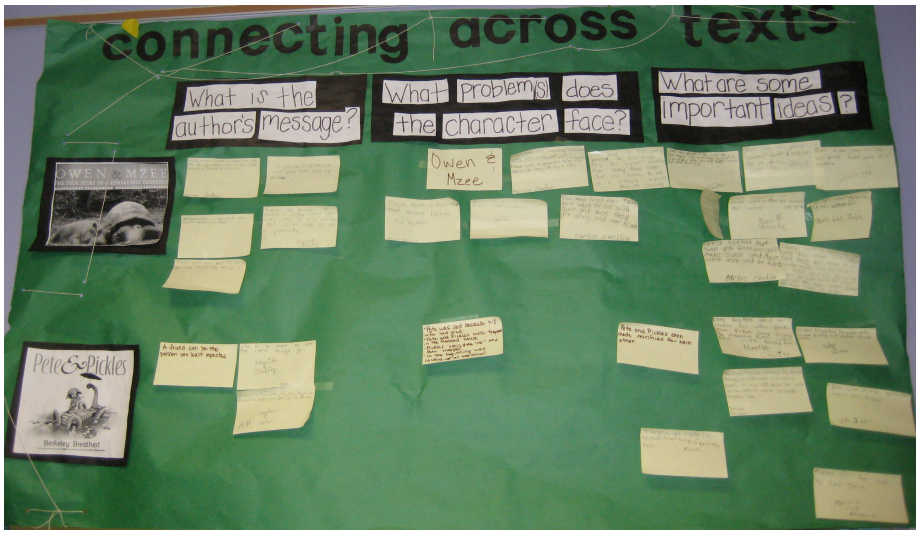
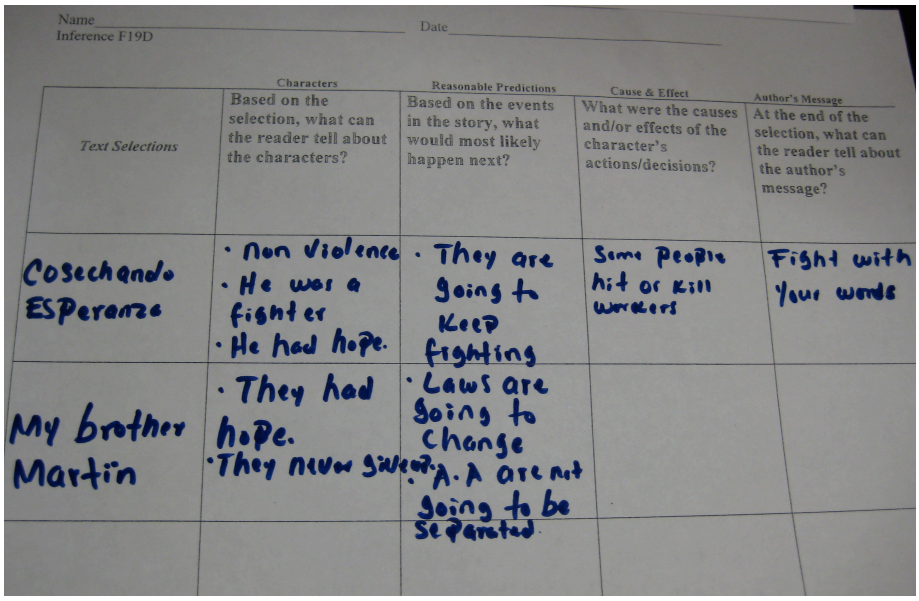


Figure 4: Language chart on character traits, predicting, cause and effect, and author's message



The examples provided in the above figures are illustrative of what these hybrid language charts typically looked like. Figures 1-3 were created using large butcher paper.

Figure 4 is an example of how one teacher created his language chart on 8 ½" x 11" paper that he then projected with a document camera. Language charts were commonly used across all 3rd-5th grade teachers. One 2nd grade teacher who taught 3rd grade the previous year also used them. None of the Pre-Kindergarten-1st grade teachers who consented to participate used them, nor did they use literature studies as a way of choosing and organizing texts.

Some of the teachers also saw chapter books as an important text choice for read alouds that were "paramount when teaching the skills of reading" (Caitlyn, First Interview). Rather than tie a collection of books together by theme or topic, the chapter books provided cohesion within on story.

> I think chapter books went really well this year because I found how to incorporate all the reading habits and even the reading TAKS-style strategies…And it felt a lot more connected because even though we were changing skills and strategies, that always feels choppy. We were still bound by this book and the same theme and the same idea of whatever we were reading. Like, Becoming Naomi Leon [by Pam Muñoz Ryan], we were trying main idea and summary, but it's still Naomi's life and her story and her struggles. I feel like that's a good way to, if you have to do the TAKS stuff, you might as well do it in a way that's pleasant for you to teach. To me I found a pretty good balance with that. (June, Final Interview)

During this interview at the end of the school year, June described how chapter books were a tool for her teaching that she enjoyed and felt were valuable for her students.

Rather than pulling from various picture books, she liked the consistency of reading one story to teach address reading skills and strategies.

In Sasha's case, using chapter books such as Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan, Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbit, and The Circuit by Francisco Jiménez were ways to engage students in "real reading" where she could show them how readers don't use just one skill in one book, but they "use them all in one book." This move attempted to address the division of reading into individual skills in isolation by asking students to enact reading habits more aligned with how reading actually occurs. Incorporating chapter books into her language arts meant using "books that are more rich and have real issues that people really deal with. Picture books are good and all, but I want them to think beyond what they've normally been reading. Read outside what they are used to reading" (Sasha, Final Interview). By reading chapter books aloud, Sasha made them accessible to all of her students.

Other types of texts besides children's literature that teachers drew on included word news and articles from kid's magazines. Rory, in particular, drew on current events, locally and internationally, to provide the content, such as reading about Libya and Qaddafi as well as dictatorships and protests. While she was well aware of the expectation to prepare for the TAKS test, she also saw the need to continue using "smart texts with good themes and topics" (Rory, Mid-year Interview) to engage her students in the content.

To support teachers' use of children's literature, Gina showed teachers how to incorporate testing language to cover required skills and objectives. This move allowed

teachers to still choose their own reading materials, without reducing them to the articles and passages found on practice test materials. For reading instruction, teachers supplemented children's literature with their own questions modeled after TAKS-like questions. Gina described this approach during a 5th grade meeting, "I used to do that, still use authentic literature and one TAKS like question on my chart. We want to start teaching them strategies that are helpful for certain types of questions so they can understand the types of questions" (Field Notes, 5th Grade Meeting, 12/10/10). This approach was used by 3rd-5th grade teachers, and by some 2nd grade teachers.

Writing their own TAKS-like questions allowed teachers to address the expectation of teaching test taking strategies while also using texts they supported. For example, during a 3rd grade planning meeting, Gina sat with the teachers to help them plan their unit on "people that make a difference." They looked through the book, Harvesting Hope by Kathleen Krull, about Cesar Chavez to write their own TAKS-like questions. The following description from field notes shows how the team worked together to write these questions.

> Gina asks, *What about cautioned?* She reads aloud the sentence from Harvesting Hope. Says that the word is well supported. The definition isn't present but since it says he wasn't a fighter…it helps you to know that caution means warning them or telling them not to fight. *Too hard or what do you think?* Gina says that she would read the book aloud but when going back to do word meaning the kids will need their own copy. Suggests they make a copy, underline the word, and then make copies because they'll never have to search for a word. (Field Notes, 3rd

Grade Meeting, 01/25/11)

Being familiar with the test allowed Gina and the teachers to develop their own teaching and assessment materials. Knowing the kinds of experiences they wanted their students to have with literature gave them the vision to be able to enact alternative practices that stepped away from test preparation materials. Rather than abandon test preparation, which would have created the harmful waves Gina described earlier, the teachers were able to find other ways of preparing students for testing without succumbing to the narrow representation of literacy and texts created by the sole use of testing materials.

For Evelyn, using materials like children's literature and language charts was freedom from doing only teaching to the test.

> I think there's a lot of good things going on on our campus and I want people to see that what we are doing works for our kids and we care about what we are doing, and that we know that there's this looming test at the end of year but we aren't going to let that get to us. We can teach in other ways besides just teaching to the test...Using meaningful literature and applying that and seeing it happen in classrooms. (Evelyn, Final Interview)

Evelyn strongly supported the use of materials that she viewed as related to good teaching and saw those materials as a bridge to prepare students for the test without teaching to the test.

For writing instruction, particularly for 4th grade teachers whose students took the writing test, using authentic texts meant finding mentor texts that teachers could use to show how writers achieved certain effects. The writing portion of the 4th grade test

consisted of having students compose a personal narrative in two pages or less that was in response to a prompt. The 4th grade teachers favored memoirs by Patricia Polacco, and read them to students to show how they related to writing prompts (Field Notes, 4th Grade Meeting, 01/03/11).

> So I used a lot of Patricia Polacco. One because it was an author that we had already read prior to that, but also because I feel like the kids get the stories and they understand the meaning behind it. There's so many rich examples of what I would like for them to get as writers…so they could see a certain kind of author craft, like she does a lot of these things really well…And I feel like it was so much easier instead of trying to pull different things…They were able to read the whole thing and see how she used imagery or was able to explode the moment. (Sasha, Final Interview)

Like Sasha, the other 4th grade teachers used children's literature to show students models of writing. They spent time reading these texts, discussing certain writing features, labeling those features (e.g., "explode the moment"), and also showed students how one writing piece might be changed slightly to answer a variety of writing prompts (i.e., "write about a time you were surprised" or "write about a special person"). In opposition to providing formulaic ways to answer a writing prompt, the 4th grade teachers saw children's literature as a way of making connections between having choice in writing, but still being able to answer a prompt.

Teaching writing in this way also involved helping students make connections across texts that were carefully chosen as model examples of good writing. Using

document cameras to project pages from books was a popular method for teachers to allow all students to see the writing while discussing it. One day, Rory projected a picture book while reading it aloud. She stopped periodically to think aloud about the content of the story and how she connected to the text as a writer. As Rory stopped periodically to talk about the writing and the kinds of reader thoughts she was having, she also invited students to contribute to the discussion. She introduced the book by saying,

> The title of this book is called On My Way to Buy Eggs by Chih-Yuan Chen. And it sounds really plain, doesn't it? A lot of us, as we make our picture books that are going to be due next week, we have to think about our stories. Some of you may be thinking, 'My story is kind of boring. All I ever do is go to Wal-Mart and pick out shoes or I just babysit my sister.' So On My Way to Buy Eggs reminded me of something that might sound boring but had a really neat, special adventure. (Video Transcript, 10/06/10)

Later Rory paused to draw attention to part of the story and how the author chose her words. She said,

> I love that sentence! [She rereads the sentence.] *Under the tree sits a pair of glasses that wants someone to wear them*. I love it! Instead of saying there were glasses under the tree and I picked them up, but the glasses wanted someone to wear them.

A couple of pages later Rory paused to say, "This page especially reminded me of the part in Ralph Fletcher's book we read yesterday [A Writer's Notebook] about being fierce wonders and wondering. So she's just wondering in the middle of her story"

(Video Transcript, 10/06/10). In this part, Rory connected the picture book to another book previously read aloud to show how both authors used their wondering as a way to compose. At the close of reading this book aloud, Rory asked her students to begin working on their picture book drafts and to think about the "treasures inside" that they wanted to share. She finished by reaffirming students' identities as writers when she said, "You have a lot of stuff going on, you're going to have to juggle it. You are going to be a writer, writers juggle lots of stories at lots of times. You already are a writer."

In preparation for the writing test, Rory asked her students to compose a picture book about a memory. This provided a link to writing a personal narrative without confining students to one prompt, and expanded the genre of "personal narrative" to take on the multiple modalities found in picture books. Rory also called her students writers to affirm their identities as such, without bringing in the discourse of test taking into her lesson.

Teachers sometimes returned to books they had previously read with their class to draw close attention to particular aspects of writing. For example, during her writing time, Rory projected the first pages of Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis, Love as Strong as Ginger by Lenore Look and Charlotte's Web by E.B. White to talk about how writers begin their stories with leads. After reading each page and asking students what they noticed, Rory said,

> Today I am teaching you about leads. One thing I know about leads is they want to catch a reader. They are like someone going fishing. Whoop! And they throw out a line with a hook on the end. (Video Transcript, 10/07/10)

Rory then went on to record some of the words students used to describe leads on a chart and concluded her writing workshop mini-lesson by saying,

> Today I want us to look at our leads and see if we can write a few more that might catch attention, catch some good words. We want to catch some good words and we want to catch our reader.

Rather than telling students what a lead is and giving them some sort of rubric for what a "good lead" looks like, Rory used children's books as mentor texts for students to see model examples with opportunities to notice and name what they read. Rory's take on teaching writing reflects philosophies shared by the National Writing Project, which Rory was connected to through professional development. Her increased knowledge and understanding of teaching writing seems to be a reflection of her professional development experiences and may have contributed to her sense of agency to teach in this way.

Incorporating new practices into their teaching language charts and literature studies, demonstrates the agency teachers had to try other practices than just teaching to the test. At the same time, the reasons teachers may have been more likely to draw on these practices may have been because they were able to see how connected they were to test preparation. As Boardman & Woodruff (2004) found, teachers tend to use the statewide assessments as a reference point to decide whether or not to adapt a new instructional practice. That teachers at Brazos Elementary perceived of these practices as supporting test-preparation goals, may explain why they so readily adopted them.

Extending the Curriculum: Representing Teaching and Student Work in Conference Presentations

A handful of teachers were interested in participating in conferences and teacher groups outside of the school. The teachers who joined in other organizations were also teachers who worked closely with Gina in her teacher inquiry groups. The main group teachers participated in was a social justice inquiry group for teachers in the local area. This group was started at the university level and encouraged teachers of all grade levels who were interested in social justice to participate. The group hosted monthly meetings around the city at different schools, including Brazos Elementary a few times. The agenda for these meetings varied and included sharing ideas for lessons about social justice, reading professional books as well as children's literature, and listening to guest speakers. Another aspect of these meetings often consisted of preparing presentations for conferences around the state. One conference that Evelyn and Rory participated in was a race unity conference held at a local university. To prepare for the conference, Evelyn and Rory planned a unit with their students to talk about race and what race unity meant to them. They collected award-winning books, including winners of the Coretta Scott King Award and the Jane Addams Award, to read with their classes. Figures 5-7 show examples of some of the work they did with their students that they then presented at the conference.

Figure 5: Race Unity posters

Figure 6: Race Unity assessment

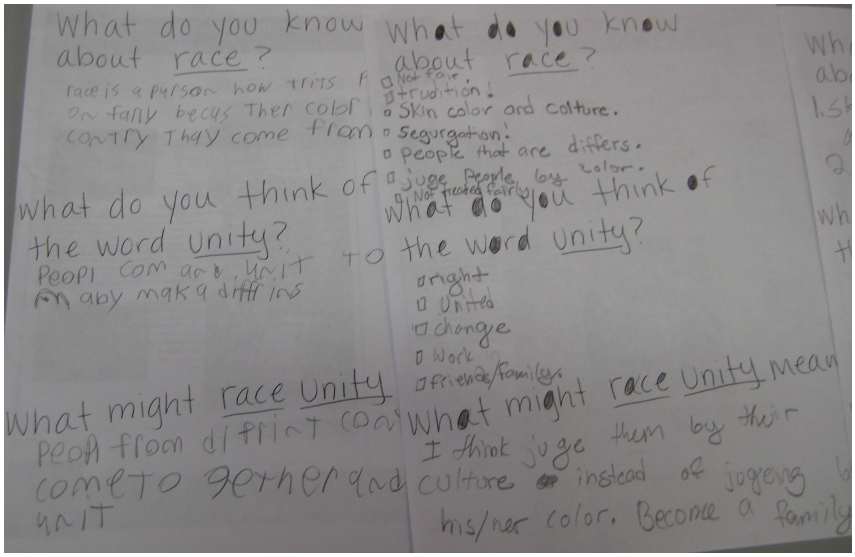
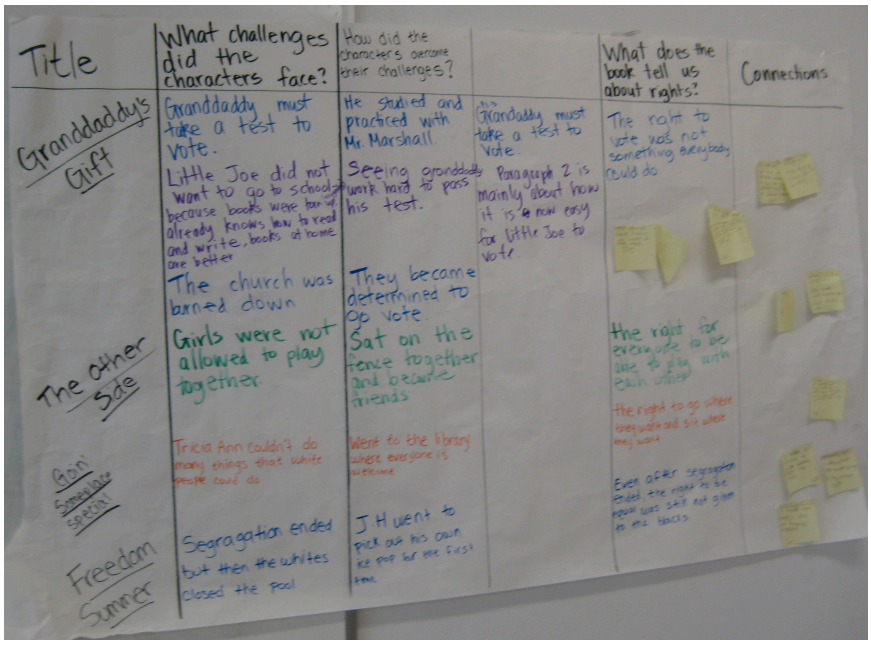


Figure 7: Language chart to support Race Unity presentation



During this presentation, they talked about the ways their students responded to the books and the kinds of experiences they created for talk about race and difference. Figure 5 shows Rory's chart on race unity where students were invited to write their ideas as an introduction to the unit. Figure 6 shows how Rory ended the unit by revisiting some of the same questions she posed in the beginning to see how her students' views might have changed. Figure 7 shows a language chart Evelyn created to accompany the unit. Rory and Evelyn's unit on race unity was planned in response to an interest they had in social justice and in sharing their teaching with a larger audience, rather than in response to curriculum guidelines. While most teachers adhere to the mandated curriculum, especially when high-stakes testing is a pressure, Rory and Evelyn carefully crafted their unit in ways that reflected the agency they had to teach in ways that challenged solely

teaching to a test.

Another presentation that teachers participated in was the Tomás River Book Award ceremony held annually at a local university. During the fall semester, Gina, Evelyn, Celestina, Rory, Leah, June, and Sasha all coordinated a special unit using Tomás River award winning books in order to participate in the ceremony that honored the current year's winner. On the day of the ceremony, the participating classes loaded onto school buses to hear the guest speakers, the honored author and illustrator. Afterwards they were given the opportunity to meet them. This event involved extra planning, gathering of resources, and coordination to attend the ceremony as a field trip. In addition, the teachers had their students create writing projects related to the award winning books. At the ceremony, their students' work lined the walls of the university auditorium. Figure 8 shows an example of one of the display areas in the auditorium.

Figure 8: Student work displayed at the Tomás Rivera Book Award Ceremony

Evelyn later described this event and unit as something that only certain teachers were interested in.

> It started with the Tomás Rivera Award and all of us wanting to do that. And I don't know that everybody else on my team was willing to put in the effort when they could just use the basal and other resources. It was kind of above and beyond because we want to do this with our kids instead of what everybody else is doing and so Gina would be willing to meet with us to do it. (Evelyn, Final Interview)

In this description, Evelyn acknowledged the support the group received from Gina to execute their plan while also describing the ways in which their work was more than what was required, something that most teachers did not want to involve themselves with because of what Evelyn perceived of as the extra time requirement. This suggests that for Evelyn and these teachers, teaching involved creativity and the need to develop lessons, even if more time was required. Additionally, Evelyn believed the incorporation of these books was valuable and important because of their cultural relevance for the students.

> Using Tomás Rivera Book award books, [was] a segue to talking about culture. They make little connections to feel like they are represented. It's important for them to know who they are and feel special and unique. Contribute to society like Tomás Rivera. A way for them to make connections and talk about themselves. (Evelyn, First Interview)

While it was important for Evelyn to incorporate culturally relevant texts, she also used these books to support her students movement towards test taking. The following is an

example of what this looked like.

> Evelyn holds up Chato's Kitchen by Gary Soto. She tells some students they'll have to help her with some of the pronunciation. She points to the chart on cause and effect and reviews what they have talked about. *For example, yesterday in Tomas and the library lady, we put…and what was the effect? So the yellow ones were from yesterday.* (Referring to sticky notes.) Evelyn says she'll use blue ones today. She Says this book also won the Tomás Rivera award. *Do you remember some of the criteria?* She flips the chart to a list of criteria. The chart says:
>
> - *Written for children and young adults (0-16)*
> - *Text and illustrations are of highest quality*
> - *Portrays and represents Mexican Americans accurately and avoids stereotypes*
>
> *Think about if this book has things you would do or eat in it. See if it has stereotypes. We do not want to think that all Mexican Americans do this. I am thinking of Skippy Jon Jones. Do you all know them? Maybe after we read some more books we'll read Skippy Jon Jones because it is a book with a lot of stereotypes.* (Field Notes, 09/14/10)

During this class example, Evelyn used Chato's Kitchen to teach cause and effect but also discussed the reason they were reading it. Figures 9 and 10 show what Evelyn's chart looked like along with the poster she created to show the graphic organizer for cause and effect.

Figure 9: Cause and effect graphic organizer

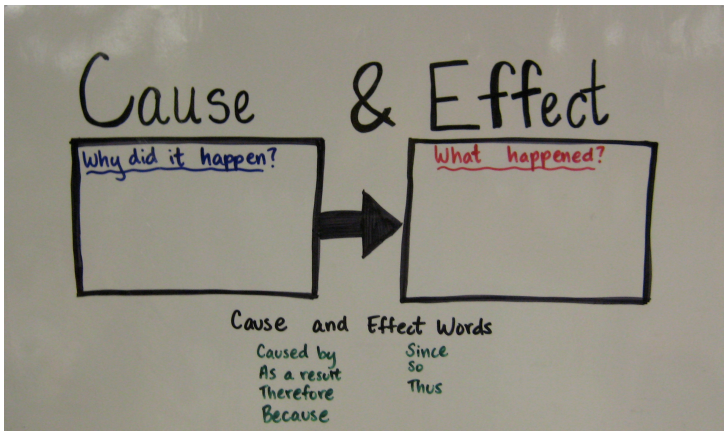
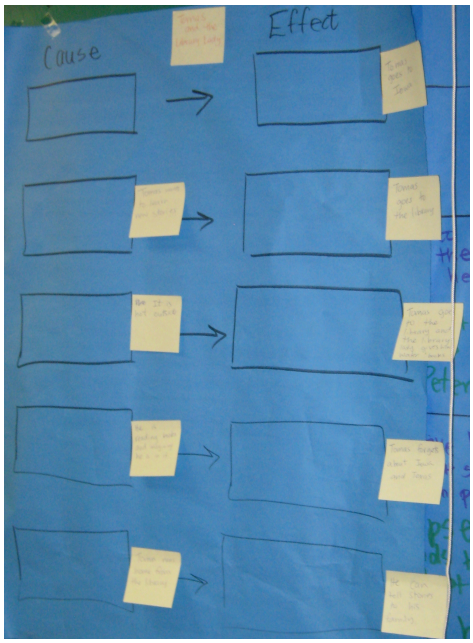


Figure 10: Language chart for cause and effect with Chato's Kitchen



This is similar to what other teachers did where teachers made sure students knew who Tomás Rivera was, why they were reading books that won an award in his honor, and how books were chosen to win the award. Having a chart with the criteria for the

award served as a reference that Evelyn could return to each time she read aloud from the books.

Conclusion

This chapter attended to the question: *In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?* The findings showed how teachers acted in agentive ways when their beliefs about literacy teaching were threatened by test preparation. The solutions the teachers came up with reflected the compromises they made to make their practices as theoretically compatible with their beliefs as possible when they understood the expectation to prepare their students for high-stakes testing. In this way, these teachers demonstrated how individuals with agency exhibit power to resist structural constraints and instead produce self-authored actions that reflect the ability to shape, and not just be shaped by, the context and situation (Holland et al., 1998; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993).

This chapter adds to the literature by illustrating how teachers can act with agency in restrictive contexts created by high-stakes testing, and by also showing the importance of key instructional leaders, such as the literacy coach at Brazos Elementary, in providing spaces for teachers to do this work of creative compliance. The literacy coach's model of balancing test preparation with one's own beliefs about literacy teaching created important alternatives for teachers to develop their adaptive practices.

The findings suggest that it was not only within the school walls that teachers demonstrated agency. Some of them also participated in conferences and organizations outside of the school as a way of extending their teaching and the curriculum. While only

a handful of teachers participated, having these avenues of professional development and teacher inquiry seemed to give teachers possibilities for teaching and learning that extended beyond a test-based curriculum. It is not clear whether these teachers already had more agency to begin with, or if they developed or enhanced their agency by participating in these groups. Either way, their willingness and desire to make a contribution to these conferences and organizations reflect a stance on teaching that shows how teachers "grow the good stuff" even when faced with high-stakes testing. This approach offers some insight into what it means to teach with agency when personal beliefs about literacy and learning may be confronted.

These findings are important in terms of expanding on what we know about how teachers respond to school reform and high-stakes testing. The teachers represented in this chapter shifted their response to testing to encompass literacy practices that supported their beliefs while also supporting test preparation at the same time. Their ability to adapt their practices to account for both raises new questions about what it means to teach with agency and creativity in the age of high-stakes accountability. While the testing culture that results from such measures does little to promote the image of teacher-as-professional, the actions of these teachers offers a heartening example of what the teaching profession really needs—agentive, decision makers who are able to navigate the demands of working in a high-stakes testing culture while still promoting quality literacy instruction.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study began because of an interest I had as a former bilingual elementary school teacher to tell a story about the pressures and demands of working in the age of high-stakes testing. I was particularly interested in examining literacy instruction and the tensions teachers experience when accountability pressures create narrow definitions of literacy. The questions that guided my inquiry were:

1. How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?
2. At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff members respond to them?
3. In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?

This is not a dismal portrait of teachers and teaching in a low-income school. It is a story about teachers and the tensions they experience as well as the choices they make that are agentive and lead them to clarifying and developing theories and practices of literacy in high-stakes testing environments. The teachers at Brazos Elementary show us the complexity of teaching within a larger system and the difficulty of the charge to teach non-dominant students in an age of high-stakes testing. Through this study, we see how high-stakes testing infiltrates teaching at a school level and classroom level. These teachers offer insight into what it means to teach in response to high-stakes testing as

well as what it means to teach with agency as standards and accountability measures increasingly encroach on teacher autonomy.

In this chapter, I review the key findings from each chapter and then I discuss how they all fit together. I also describe the limitations of this study; implications this research has for teacher education, in-service teachers, and policy makers and administrators; and directions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

This ethnographic study examined the literacy teaching practices of teachers in a school that primarily serves Latino students. I illustrated how standardized testing translated to literacy teaching on a daily basis, as well as the ways the school organization responded to these pressures. Chapter 4 addressed the question: *How does Brazos Elementary respond through its school organization to large-scale reform efforts?* I examined the organization of the school through the lens of high-stakes testing to show how the school was "defined by TAKS scores" (June, 4th grade bilingual teacher, Mid-year Interview). This description of the school was reflected in the ways the school interpreted large-scale reform efforts, where organizational decisions resulted in uneven attention and support for teachers and students. For those teachers in the intermediate grades, more resources in the form of money and support staff were allocated to support them with test preparation and raising test scores. In terms of bilingual education, informed decisions were made about students' language of instruction and testing, but otherwise bilingual education received little attention. The ultimate decisions about language of testing, while initially informed by language proficiency test scores and

informal reading assessments, ultimately were made in response to benchmark and release test scores as a predictor of passing the TAKS test. As for primary grades teachers, while administration acknowledged the need to provide support for their teaching, and often viewed those teachers as having ineffective teaching practices, the strong emphasis on test scores diverted resources and time in equitable ways across grade levels.

Unlike most research on school reform, which focuses on programmatic initiatives to redesign schools or the use of prepackaged curriculum (e.g., Au & Raphael, 2007; Borman et al., 2007), the school reform documented in this study adopted a broader definition of school reform to included any practice, mandate, standard, etc. in place to change, monitor, or influence teaching. Expanding how we define school reform allows us to see the numerous ways in which schools respond to high-stakes testing, rather than remaining stagnate or unchanged. In this sense, school reform is more than just a formal set of movements initiated from an outsider or prescribed program, but also encompasses the ways in which schools organize and respond from the inside on a daily basis in response to standards-based reform efforts at the national level, that call for the use of assessments to measure student progress against a set of standards (Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002).

Most research on high-stakes testing focuses on how the curriculum is changed as a result of testing (e.g., McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Shepard, 1990; Valli et al., 2008) or how teachers respond to accountability measures (e.g., Haladyna et al., 1991; Moore, 1994; Urdan & Paris, 1994). This study contributes to this body of literature by extending

the analysis of a schools' curriculum and practices to an illustration of how an administration and instructional team altered the entire school organization in response to high-stakes testing. Further, I provide evidence for a discussion of inequity with regard to the ways in which non-tested grade teachers and students were affected because of their membership within a larger structure that by necessity must support accountability measures. Examining school organization, not just instructional practices, through the lens of high-stakes testing offers insight into why teachers might have certain experiences and practices.

The organization of the school also suggests that high-stakes testing influenced teachers' understanding of their roles and each other's roles in the school. Teachers in the intermediate grades understood the importance of their students' test scores and thus viewed themselves as being in charge of making sure their students passed the tests. For example, Leah, a 4th grade teacher, described her understanding of this importance by saying, "I know we have to make a certain score" (Leah, Final Interview). For teachers in the primary grades like Karen and David, they felt they had an important role in supporting foundational literacy experiences, but felt undervalued because their teaching did not directly support test taking (Karen, Final Interview). As a result, they felt they were doing the work of supporting their students on their own (David, First Interview)

Teachers viewed the support staff's roles as helping the intermediate grades teachers with planning and by working directly with small groups of students on test preparation (June, First Interview). Gina understood her role as literacy coach to change depending on the time of the year. In the first semester she focused on supporting

teachers with their classroom practices while in the spring semester her role shifted to "mostly just supporting them [students] for the state tests" (Gina, Final Interview). In the principal's case, she perceived her role as principal to support and confirm teachers were making curricular decisions based on the TEKS (Lucia, First Interview).

The school's organization to support testing was problematic because of how it privileged testing and the practices that accompany test preparation. This biased emphasis on literacy practices for test preparation perpetuates inequities in school where literacy experiences are distorted and imbalanced due to the emphasis placed on promoting test scores. As a result, students and teachers in the primary grades received less support, and quality literacy teaching and development were not emphasized or promoted. For students and teachers in the intermediate grades, a different sort of distortion occurred where literacy practices were emphasized, but only to support test taking. This representation of literacy as skills in isolation connected to testing did little to promote meaningful uses of literacy.

While Chapter 4 focused on high-stakes testing at the school level, Chapter 5 focused on the classroom level and answered the question: *At the classroom level, how do literacy teaching practices intersect with literacy reform efforts and how do teachers and staff members respond to them?* The findings suggest that test preparation infused daily literacy instruction despite a general consensus among teachers that teaching to the test was against their own beliefs. The ways in which test preparation affected the classroom life could be seen in the ways that teachers organized and reorganized their class schedules to accommodate test preparation, and in the specific ways they taught students

to take the tests that included paying attention to the language of the test, applying test taking strategies, and practicing with materials that resembled the test. Also in response to high-stakes testing were the variety of assessments teachers were expected to administer throughout the school year to track student progress and make instructional and grouping decisions. The resulting literacy teaching practices, as well as pressures for testing performance, created tension for most teachers, who thus taught in ways they did not whole heartedly agree with. The presentation of standardized testing resulted in narrow definitions of literacy reduced to disconnected skills in isolation without clear connections to meaningful uses of literacy. Notwithstanding, teachers recognized their strong beliefs against testing could not supersede the importance of preparing their students for the test because of the ramifications low test scores could have. This was illustrated by Gina, the literacy coach, when she said, "I'm not doing kids any good, if I just say that I don't agree with TAKS and it's not a good measure of what kids know and therefore I'm not going to support teachers and kids and success on that" (Gina, Final Interview). Like other teachers, Gina understood the weight test scores had within the larger system.

The findings from this chapter support the literature that shows how high-stakes testing works to perpetuate a history of inequitable literacy practices for students in low-income schools (Apple, 2002). Test preparation as literacy practice worked in ways that limited teaching practices and the curriculum, and reflects a larger structure of power that works to control education (Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Madaus, 1988). By altering teaching practices, such as the organization of time to allow for more test preparation or

grouping students by test scores rather than by reading level, high-stakes testing served to deny students the opportunity to receive support appropriate to their instructional needs (Au & Raphael, 2000).

By taking a broad approach to understanding what school reform is and looks like, this study bridged the connection between school reform and high-stakes testing where school reform was viewed as being in response to preparing for high-stakes testing. In this way, I showed how the teachers and staff members at Brazos Elementary responded to school reform in order to honor test preparation as a sanctioned and expected literacy practice. Despite strong beliefs about the negative effects of high-stakes testing on literacy, teaching, learning, and students, teachers made changes to their literacy teaching practices such as scheduling changes to accommodate test preparation, incorporating test-like materials, teaching test-taking strategies, and even replacing some practices (e.g., guided reading). Their teaching was thus altered in ways that reflected a deep compliance with testing such that test preparation was synonymous with literacy teaching. This finding challenges other studies of school reform that ask the question of why school change does not occur when reform efforts are made. The literature on school reform and how schools and teachers respond focus on the implementation of programs for school change and do little to take into account the social and political contexts. These studies generally conclude that large-scale reforms are not effective and that teachers are largely unresponsive for many reasons that include time, pacing, support, and beliefs (Payne, 2008). This study shows the ways in which teachers are responsive to reform. The question is thus not a matter of "why does so little change occur?" or "why do

teachers not respond to reform efforts?" but a matter of "what happens when teachers do respond to reform and what implications does it have on teaching?" and "how are teachers affected when asked to change their practices in response to reform?"

The expectations placed on teachers to prepare students for tests does not position them as autonomous professionals, but as workers in a larger system meant to uphold the values of a testing culture while getting results. The work of a teacher thus moves away from providing quality literacy instruction to managing tasks not directly related to literacy such as organizing schedules to accommodate test preparation, teaching test taking strategies, and giving assessments. The result is a distortion of literacy practices where educational opportunities are limited, especially for students in low-incomes schools, and teachers' instruction must be responsive to students' testing data and not necessarily their individual literacy needs or interests.

In Chapter 6, the research question addressed was: *In what ways do teachers make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs?* Through an analysis of teaching practices as evidenced in classroom observations and planning meetings, I showed that despite the problems and challenges teachers encountered in terms of teaching to the test, this did not necessarily mean they could only teach in the formulaic ways that often accompanies test preparation. While the demands of preparing students for the TAKS test were foreboding, teachers bridged the expectation to teach to the test with other supports for literacy teaching—the use of authentic literature, reading for enjoyment, and choice about reading and writing—ways of teaching that are usually reduced or dropped as test-driven instruction takes over (Au & Raphael, 2000). Often

with the support of the literacy coach, teachers found ways to act with agency in order to construct their own responses to accountability measures (Holland et al., 1998) and support their own beliefs about teaching literacy. For example, the use of hybrid language charts along with literature studies to introduce and practice using the testing language serves as an example of how some teachers reacted to testing pressures by finding ways to make their literacy teaching practices theoretically compatible with their beliefs about literacy teaching while still supporting students with test preparation. This demonstrated their agency to respond to the context of standardized testing in a way that they were able to shape, and not just be shaped by, the situation.

The findings from this chapter contribute to the literature on teachers' response to reform by expanding our understanding of how teachers respond to reform and high-stakes testing to include a look at teacher agency. Previous research, including this study, show the ways in which teacher autonomy is threatened by high-stakes testing and how practices as well as curriculum get altered. What is missing from the literature, however, is a look at how teachers work in agentive ways to combat the negative effects of testing in order to make their literacy teaching practices as theoretically sound as they can be. While we know about and can see the ways in which teachers are affected emotionally by testing, even to the point of feeling powerless (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Smith, 1991), more research is needed that shows what teachers do, and can do, when they feel empowered. This study begins to fill this need as it shows how some teachers constructed their own response to high-stakes testing without having to work completely against their own beliefs.

In their study about how two teachers took up literacy reform efforts in differing ways, Maloch and Worthy (forthcoming) concluded that the difference was in the teachers' sense-making, including their beliefs, values, interpretations of the principles and practices of the reform, and the ways they used their available resources. In this study, this notion of sense-making is extended to also include agency, or the awareness and confidence teachers had to not just teach in the expected ways, but to also adapt those practices to suit their own beliefs and favored practices. Some teachers, such as Rory and Evelyn, adapted their teaching practices in ways that supported their beliefs and desire to be certain kinds of teachers while others, such as Paula, did not have the same sense of agency and described their teaching as being controlled and restrictive. The differences in their practices thus reflect a difference in agency.

The support teachers received from the literacy coach to create practices they could defend as being theoretically compatible with their own beliefs suggest the ways that teachers might be empowered to work under stressful conditions. An analysis of Gina's role working with an informal learning group contributes to the literature on professional development. Professional development is most successful at influencing teaching practices when it is sustained across time and is aligned with reform intentions (Cohen & Ball, 1990). In this sense, the learning group can be likened to a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where individuals learned together and shared beliefs and understandings (Barab & Duffy, 2000). In communities of practice, the individual's relations to the community are important in the development of knowledge and professional growth, as demonstrated by Gina's informal learning group. This small

community of teachers played an important role in promoting agentive decision-making and offered an alternative to the decisions made at the school level about literacy teaching in response to test preparation. Because schools are such a complex organization belonging to a larger network where inequitable practices are often promoted, it is ever more important for teachers to be responsive to their teaching contexts and promote more responsible decision-making practices. The ability to do so can be enhanced when teachers work in concert with others and in spaces that allow for these communities of practices to emerge. The findings from this study add to the literature by expanding definitions of professional development to include the smaller communities in large contexts, such as schools, where teachers can engage in sustained encounters with "like-others" to generate support and a knowledge base (Shulman, 2004).

Another way this study makes a contribution to the literature on professional development is by examining teacher agency as it relates to participation in professional organizations. Professional organizations provide alternative spaces for teachers to develop their practices and teaching identities amongst others with similar goals and interests (Rogers, Mosley, & Kramer, 2009; Rogers & The Literacy for Social Justice Teacher Research Group, 2005). Some of the teachers participated in professional groups outside of the school, which included making presentations at conferences. These kinds of contexts serve as another community to which teachers belong and find encouragement. The teachers' agency was evident when they took a stance that teaching is belonging to a larger professional community, and saw themselves as teachers with

something to share and contribute. They found ways to publicly share how they taught in theoretically defensible ways.

The teachers at Brazos Elementary demonstrate the difficulties of teaching in a high-stakes testing environment, but also provide hope in terms of what can be done to contest the adverse consequences of accountability. Having agency and being able to "talk back" to limited literacy teaching practices made a difference for these teachers who did not have to completely compromise their own beliefs about literacy, teaching, and learning. Their efforts serve as an example of how teachers, while continually asked to teach in ways they may not agree with, can find ways to create leverage for themselves and the practices they value the most.

These findings are important in terms of expanding on what we know about how teachers respond to school reform and high-stakes testing. The ways they adapted their practices to the high-stakes testing context demonstrates teachers' ability to counter some of the negative conditions created from testing with agency and inventiveness. Although the larger system created from testing worked to position them as less than professionals, they counteracted by positioning themselves as agentive decision makers. This offers a promising picture of what the teaching field needs now more than ever as educational experiences are continually infringed upon.

Summary

The previous chapters describe the experiences of teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators at Brazos Elementary as they relate to literacy instruction and school reform, and illustrate the complex set of relationships that account for what happens day

to day, why these things happen, how things get done, how things get decided, and the roles everyone in the school plays that contribute to its functioning. All of these factors are influenced by the larger context of where schools are situated within a regime of high-stakes accountability. The decisions made at the school and classroom levels are reflections of how national and state legislation are interpreted by school district personnel, administrators, and teachers. Schools are therefore not cohesive enterprises where the best interest of everyone is served, but subsets of a larger system that promote the values and ideologies created by those in charge of making policy and legislative decisions. Cuban's (2010) historical account of the school district in Austin, illustrates this by examining how the school district has changed in response to larger changes in society, particularly as high-stakes testing has become more and more dominant in education.

For schools like Brazos Elementary, the intense pressure created from testing, especially with a concern for failing scores, often results in decision-making that supports test taking, with little consideration given to the consequences such a narrow focus on school organization and education might have for those not directly affected by testing and for those who are directly affected. By providing a comprehensive focus of what happens at the school level, this study examines the experiences of staff members to see the implications of these interpretations. A focus on their experiences also illustrates the complexity of teaching within an age of high-stakes testing and the difficulty of teaching non-dominant students.

For some, however, like the teachers represented in chapter 6, we can see that teachers need not surrender their own professional identities and knowledge. For these teachers, the challenges that accompanied high-stakes testing resulted in new practices. These new practices exemplified their creative compliance to work within the testing system while teaching in ways they found theoretically defensible with their own beliefs.

Implications of the Study

In support of other studies that show how teaching in response to testing pressures typically reduces literacy practices to isolated skills, and thus perpetuates the inequality of instruction offered to students at low-income schools (Apple, 2002; Apple & King, 1977), this study offers further compelling arguments against the use of high-stakes testing to determine student, teacher, and school outcomes. In particular, this study fills a need for ethnographic research at the elementary level that examines how schools are affected by high-stakes testing with a particular need for understanding how testing translates to the classroom level (Pauly, 1991). The findings from this study have implications for teacher education, in-service teachers, and for policy makers and administrators.

Implications for teacher education.

This study widens our understanding of what occurs as teachers go about the daily business of teaching literacy under the umbrella of high-stakes testing. As teacher educators, this is important to recognize as we do not just prepare preservice teachers for best-case scenarios, but for all contexts they might enter as novice teachers. Part of the process of preparing preservice teachers for the field must acknowledge the tensions new

teachers will face with regard to testing and accountability systems. Rather than ignore or pretend these pressures are not a daily part of teaching, teacher educators need to address these issues head on so preservice teachers can enter the field with agency and confidence to enact the best practices they learned about, which may not have included what happens when asked to teach to a test.

The reality of teaching in high-stakes environments calls on teachers to develop theories and practices to teach literacy that may be very different from those we teach in teacher education. As we prepare preservice teachers to do what we think are the best practices for kids, preservice teachers continually build theories about what is best for kids and what works and does not work. When they enter the teaching field, depending on the context of their classroom and school, those theories get reshaped and reworked in response to the new environment. The particularities of their context are thus important in how novice teachers take up the practices and theories we offer as part of teacher education. The re-theorizing and re-appropriating of practices is important work on behalf of preservice teachers as they come to understand what it means to teach in a particular context and given situation. This re-theorizing about teaching and literacy does not occur within a vacuum but within a political context. As teacher educators, we need to bridge the gap between our university classes and this wider, political context so preservice teachers have a broader understanding of what it means to teach. One way we can address this is by asking them to apply what they read about and discuss in class to a particular context where there may be hurdles or complications due to testing pressures. We can also help them by addressing the pressures they might see in their field

placements. We need to help them not only notice and name when dissonance occurs between theory and practice, but to construct their own responses that demonstrate agentive ways of thinking and reacting, rather than solely being acted upon.

Finally, understanding the role agency plays in learning to teach is important. Just as research examines teacher agency in in-service teachers, we also need to broaden our understanding of how agency gets developed in preservice teacher education programs. More research is need that looks at what experiences in teacher education lead preservice teachers to develop agency and to be able to make sound decisions about their practices when their own beliefs are threatened.

Implications for in-service teachers.

Just as this study has important implications for preparing teachers for the field, it also has implications for teachers who are already in the field. This study draws attention to and increases our understanding of the context teachers inhabit on a daily basis. These findings can help teachers see the ways in which they might act in agentive ways to make their practices as theoretically sound as they can be. This offers an alternative view to teaching where teachers may feel powerless because of the pressures placed on them to increase test scores. It is important for teachers to understand that teaching does not necessarily have to mean compromising all beliefs, and that teachers can negotiate the demands placed on them rather than displacing agency and power to the policies and reforms they feel inclined to yield to. One part of feeling empowered to teach in this way may relate to the support teachers have from each other, just as Gina and some of the teachers had their own system of support. An implication of this study is thus the

important role communities play for teachers in terms of having support and a knowledge base (Shulman, 2004). Increasing teacher agency to more easily navigate testing pressures may also help with teacher retention.

Implications for policy makers and administrators.

For policy makers and administrators, this study brings up questions about the effects of high-stakes testing when teaching practices are reduced to test preparation and basic skills and objectives. An examination at the school and classroom level reveals the ways in which high-stakes testing has ramifications at all levels, not just for those tested. For administrators, this asks them to consider the ways the whole school is affected by high-stakes testing, and to support teachers in finding ways to teach that refute narrow definitions of literacy. We can learn from Gina's example where a strong advocate for literacy, who also has a strong background in literacy, can make the difference for supporting teachers to teach in theoretically defensible ways. This opens up the possibility for teaching in ways that go against just teaching to the test.

For policy makers, these findings show the complexity of teaching and the heavy weight high-stakes testing might bear on teachers as they are asked to teach in ways they may not feel good about. It begs the question of what other professionals are constantly asked to do their work in ways that negate how they were prepared or what they believe in? Despite this dissonance, teachers continue to do the work they are presented with. Rather than asking why teachers do not change their practices when policies are created, policy makers should be asking what happens when teachers do respond, and seek to be more sensitive to the insight teachers can offer for making educational decisions.

Limitations

I purposefully designed this study to focus on the experiences of the teachers at Brazos Elementary. Because I was interested in understanding how they interpreted reform and high-stakes testing, I did not collect data from their students or from community members such as the parents of the students. Data from students and parents would have offered insightful information and more depth to understanding how high-stakes testing infiltrated the school on other levels.

Another limitation of this study is that not all teachers in the school participated. Their experiences are therefore not represented in the data and it is possible their experiences would have added more understanding, or presented different findings.

Future Research

This study is just the beginning for me in continuing to explore and tell the story of teaching in high-stakes testing environments. On one hand, it is important for me to express the negative impact testing has on schools and classroom life. On the other hand, it is also important for me to show the important and seemingly impossible work that teachers do to teach literacy as they are confronted with so many barriers to "good teaching." I want to continue examining the ways in teachers negotiate the demands of high-stakes accountability so that we can learn from their agentive decisions about how to teach in ways they believe in, even if the wider context of testing cannot be changed. In response to my call for more research that looks at agency and the role it plays in teaching, I will continue to investigate this line of research by working with in-service teachers, and I would also like to work with preservice teachers to better understand how

teacher preparation plays an important role in preparing teachers for contexts where high-stakes testing has a stronghold. At the same time, I am also interested in how to best support preservice and in-service teachers who, like Paula, do not exhibit agency. I wonder what experiences contribute to the development of agency or work against the development of agency?

Another area of interest that comes from this study addresses one of the limitations where there was a lack of student and parent data. I would like to continue this ethnographic line of work and extend it to not only the teachers but also to the students and parents as a way of broadening our understanding of what happens when testing permeates the life of a school. Having multiple perspectives, not just the teachers', will provide more insight about what happens in school communities and how all those involved are affected.

This study addressed an issue of how high-stakes testing intersects with a low-income school where students have historically struggled on standardized tests. While this is a problem many low-income schools face, in terms of how teaching and the curriculum get altered, low-income, low-performing schools are not the only ones affected. Even schools that are high-performing experience pressures to increase test scores or to stay at the top. I would like to open this research up to look at schools that have higher performance levels as well to show how testing pressures occur across the board, regardless of status or student demographics. Opening this study up to a variety of schools and to parents as well, may help increase parental awareness about what happens in schools. Parental voice may just be the key to getting policy makers and districts to

listen more carefully as teachers express dissatisfaction with the present state of education.

Finally, one other line of research I would like to follow relates to the role professional organizations play in teacher agency and efficacy. This study serves as an introduction to thinking about what these kinds of experiences afford teachers and in particular, I am interested in teachers who are actively involved in presenting their work for wider audiences and how this role as presenter might be an important part of understanding how teachers view their field and responsibilities.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study of Brazos Elementary School addresses important questions about what happens at the school and classroom level as reform efforts created at the national and state level get interpreted on a local level. The experiences of the teachers at Brazos Elementary show us the complexity of teaching within a larger system, especially when an emphasis on high-stakes testing infiltrates teaching. With intense pressures to perform well on high-stakes testing, authorities in schools often make decisions based on what they think will get results, without necessarily considering the implications these decisions might have on the school organization, classroom teaching, and education overall. The notion of schools as cohesive enterprises designed to serve the best interest of everyone is therefore disrupted as we question why decisions are made and whose values and ideologies are privileged in schools. Rather than finish with a negative view of teaching and schools, I emphasize the important and promising role teachers play in combating the negative effects created by schools and high-stakes

testing. Teachers must question and be proactive in their teaching contexts to promote responsible decision-making practices, especially in spaces where inequitable practices prevail and non-dominant students are subject to victimization by the unjust conditions created by those in power.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Initial Interview Protocol for Classroom Teachers, Literacy Coach, and Reading Specialists

1) I'd like you to tell me about your teaching experience. How long have you been teaching and what brought you to this profession?
2) What was your undergraduate major?
3) Tell me about your teacher preparation courses. What was emphasized in your literacy course work?
4) How did you obtain your initial teacher certification?
5) What teacher certification(s) do you hold?
6) Have you completed graduate course work?
7) How many years have you been teaching?
8) How long have you been at Brazos Elementary?
9) What grade level(s) do you teach?
10) What subject(s) do you teach?
11) Tell me about your classroom.
12) Tell me about your daily schedule.
13) What does literacy instruction look like in your classroom?
14) Describe your goals for the school year, your students, and the classroom.
15) Tell me about [literacy event observed]. What happened? What were your goals?
16) How will this affect your future teaching?
17) What influences the way you teach and the things you teach?
18) What does literacy mean to you?
19) What are your experiences with learning to read and write?
20) How do your experiences influence the ways you teach reading and writing?

Initial Interview Protocol for Administrators

1) Tell me about Brazos Elementary as a school. How has it changed?
2) Tell me about your philosophy as a principal.
3) What do you do to support literacy instruction in the school?
4) Are there things that are mandated? Who mandates this?
5) Describe a typical work day for you.
6) Are there interesting stories I should follow as a researcher?
7) Where do you see the school as being in terms of literacy teaching? What work remains to be done?
8) What do you thing are some of the strengths of literacy program here?
9) What do you thing are some of the weaknesses of literacy program here?
10) Tell me about planning with teams. How do you do this? What influences the way you plan?
11) What are some meetings you have with teams that would be interesting for me to see?
12) How many teachers are employed here?
13) What are the demographics of the students here?

14) In the last year the school went from being a focus school to being a recognized school by the district, how did this change happen?

Mid-year Interview Protocol for Focus Participants

1) Looking back at the first part of the school year, what were the major sources of influence on your teaching/coaching? What changes have you made and why? What have you learned? etc.
2) With all of the data planning that's been going on, what will your teaching/coaching look like next semester? How does all the data influence your teaching/coaching or how you think about your teaching/coaching?
3) Can you describe a particular teaching experience that has gone well for you?
4) Looking back over the first part of the year, how have you influenced literacy teaching in the school? What improvements have teachers in the school made this first semester? What still needs work?
5) Now that TAKS will be approaching in the spring, how will the school change or get ready? What expectations do you feel are in place for teachers?
6) Can you tell me about the data planning days you had? How were those planned? Are they an expectation district wide?

Final Interview Protocol for Classroom Teachers

1) How has your classroom change over the course of the school year?
2) How has your daily schedule changed over the course of the school year? If so, how did it change and why did it change?
3) At the beginning of the school year you described your goals for the school year as _____, can you talk more about those goals now that we are at the end of the school year? Did you meet your goals? Did you create new goals? Why?
4) When you plan your literacy block, what are the most important things for you to attend to?
5) Looking back on the school year, how would you describe your goals for teaching reading? Writing? How did you teach reading and writing? How did your teaching change over the course of the school year? What influenced these changes?
6) How much do you rely on professional books written for teachers? Which ones influenced your teaching?
7) How do you define success for yourself as a teacher? For your students? For the school? What does it look like?
8) What do you try and do with your questions and comments while you conduct read alouds?
9) How do you select books for your classroom library? For your read alouds? For students to read independently and in small groups?
10) Tell me about [literacy event observed]. What were your goals when you planned it? How would you evaluate what happened for the students in the classroom? How will this affect your future teaching?
11) Describe a literacy event that went well this year. Describe one that did not go well.

12) Based on your teaching of reading and writing this year, what will you do the same/differently next year?
13) When I observe in your room I usually take photos of the charts you have on the walls. Can you talk about these charts? How do they contribute to your teaching?
14) What kinds of supports has the school put into place to help you as a literacy teacher? How well do you feel supported to teach literacy?
15) What policies or standards affect the way you teach literacy? How effective do you think these policies and standards are for helping you meet the learning needs of the students in your classroom?
16) Can you tell me about a time a policy or standard might have impacted your teaching? How did it play out in your classroom?
17) How does your teaching support or not support the existing policies and standards?
18) If you were able to make decisions about the policy and standards for language arts, what would they be?
19) What role do assessments play in your literacy teaching? What assessments do you give to students? How do you decide what assessments to give and how often? How do you use the results of the assessments in your teaching?
20) Can you tell me about homework in your classroom? How does it support the literacy teaching during the day? Is this a personal assignment or is this a team expectation, or school wide expectation?
21) What roles do the parents play in schools' literacy learning? What role do you want them to play? How do you see them playing or not playing these roles?
22) How have you familiarized yourself with the community that Brazos Elementary is a part of?
23) Tell me about your relationship with parents at Brazos Elementary.
24) Why do you think you were open to letting me observe and research your teaching?
25) Can you tell me about how the rest of your school year will go?
26) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your teaching, your classroom, or the school?

Final Interview Protocol for Literacy Coach

1) How has your job changed over the course of the school year?
2) Goals for the school year- Did you meet your goals? Did you create new goals? Why?
3) How do you define success for yourself as a teacher? For your students? For the school? What does it look like?
4) When you observe literacy teaching in classrooms, what are the most important things you attend to?
5) Can you provide me with an example of how you have supported teachers with their literacy teaching this year?
6) How are decisions made with regard to resources, tutoring, professional development?
7) How are decisions made about staffing for next year?
8) Can you tell me about the budget cuts that occurred this year?

9) What are the goals you have for teachers, students, and the school?
10) Describe a literacy event you observed this year that went really well. What about one that did not go well?
11) What does the school still have to work on in the area of literacy? What will the school do differently/same next year based on this year?
12) Can you tell me about the summer school you are planning?
13) Can you tell me about the role of outside parties in the school—the university and student teachers?
14) What kinds of supports has the school/district put into place to help you as a literacy coach teacher? How well do you feel supported to teach literacy?
15) What have been the major sources of influence on your literacy teaching? What changes have you made over the semester and why? What have you learned? etc.
16) What policies or standards affect the way you teach literacy? How effective do you think these policies and standards are for helping you meet the learning needs of the students in your classroom?
17) Can you tell me about a time a policy or standard might have impacted your teaching? How did it play out in your classroom?
18) How does your teaching support or not support the existing policies and standards?
19) If you were able to make decisions about the policy and standards for language arts, what would they be?
20) What role do assessments play in your literacy teaching? What assessments do you give to students? How do you decide what assessments to give and how often? How do you use the results of the assessments in your teaching?
21) Why do you think you were open to letting me observe and research your teaching?
22) Can you tell me about how the rest of your school year will go?
23) Talk about how you prepare teachers and students for test taking strategies. How do you avoid teaching to the test? How do you teach to the test? There were 2 teachers new to grade level testing this year, how did you prepare them to teach 3rd grade test taking?
24) How do you decide to allocate your time? How does your time get divided up between grade levels? Do you have future plans to work with Prek-1st grades?
25) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your teaching, your classroom, or the school?

Final Interview Protocol for Administrators

1) How has the school changed over the course of the school year?
2) Has your role as the [assistant] principal changed? How? Why?
3) When you observe literacy teaching in classrooms, what are the most important things you attend to?
4) Can you provide me with an example of how you have supported teachers with their literacy teaching this year?
5) How do you define success for yourself as an administrator? For the teachers? For the students? For the school? What does it look like?

6) What policies or standards affect the way teachers teach literacy? How effective do you think these policies and standards are for helping them meet the learning needs of the students?
7) What roles do the parents play in schools' literacy learning? What role do you want them to play? How do you see them playing or not playing these roles?
8) Can you tell me about how the rest of your school year will go?
9) How are decisions made about resources, tutoring, and professional development?
10) How are decisions made about staffing for next year?
11) Can you tell me about the budget cuts that occurred this year?
12) What are the goals you have for teachers, students, and the school?
13) Describe a literacy event you observed this year that went really well. What about one that did not go well?
14) What does the school still have to work on in the area of literacy? What will the school do differently/same next year based on this year?
15) Can you tell me about the summer school you are planning?
16) Can you tell me about the role of outside parties in the school—the university and student teachers?
17) What role do assessments play in your literacy teaching? What assessments do you give to students? How do you decide what assessments to give and how often? How do you use the results of the assessments in your teaching?
18) Why were you open to letting me do research here?
19) Is there anything else you would like me to know about you or the school?

Final Interview Protocol for Reading Specialists

1) How has your job changed over the course of the school year?
2) What goals did you have for the school year? Did you meet your goals? Did you create new goals? Why?
3) How do you define success for yourself as a teacher? For your students? For the school? What does it look like?
4) Describe a literacy event that went well this year. Describe one that did not go well.
5) Based on your teaching this year, what will you do the same/differently next year?
6) What kinds of supports has the school put into place to help you as a literacy teacher? How well do you feel supported to teach literacy?
7) What have been the major sources of influence on your literacy teaching? What changes have you made over the semester and why? What have you learned? etc.
8) What policies or standards affect the way you teach literacy? How effective do you think these policies and standards are for helping you meet the learning needs of the students in your classroom?
9) Can you tell me about a time a policy or standard might have impacted your teaching? How did it play out in your classroom?
10) How does your teaching support or not support the existing policies and standards?
11) If you were able to make decisions about the policy and standards for language arts, what would they be?

12) What role do assessments play in your literacy teaching? What assessments do you give to students? How do you decide what assessments to give and how often? How do you use the results of the assessments in your teaching?
13) Why do you think you were open to letting me observe and research your teaching?
14) Can you tell me about how the rest of your school year will go?
15) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your teaching, your classroom, or the school?

Final Interview Protocol for Student Teachers

1) How has your understanding of teaching literacy been expanded on during your internship and student teaching at Brazos Elementary?
2) How would you characterize the literacy teaching practices of your placement classroom? The grade level? The school?
3) What did you contribute/bring to the literacy teaching?
4) What surprised you about literacy teaching at the school?
5) How did your classroom and teaching change over the course of the school year?
6) What goals did you have in terms of teaching literacy? How supported were you by your cooperating teacher in the school in reaching these goals?
7) Describe a literacy event that went well this year. Describe one that did not go well.
8) Based on your teaching of reading and writing this year, what will you do the same/differently next year?
9) What policies or standards affect the way you teach literacy? How effective do you think these policies and standards are for helping you meet the learning needs of the students in your classroom?
10) Can you tell me about a time a policy or standard might have impacted your teaching? How did it play out in your classroom?
11) What role do assessments play in your literacy teaching? What assessments do you give to students? How do you decide what assessments to give and how often? How do you use the results of the assessments in your teaching?
12) What roles do the parents play in schools' literacy learning? What role do you want them to play? How do you see them playing or not playing these roles?
13) How have you familiarized yourself with the community that Brazos Elementary is a part of?
14) Tell me about your relationship with parents at Brazos Elementary.
15) Why do you think you were open to letting me observe and research your teaching?
16) Is there anything else you would like me to know about your teaching, your classroom, or the school?

APPENDIX B: CATEGORIES DERIVED FROM OPEN-CODING

First Set of Categories Developed from Initial Codes	Revised List of Categories
1. Literacy coach	1. Administration: perception of teachers
2. Teacher learning	2. Background information
3. Influence and support	3. Bilingual education: Lower versus upper grades
4. Teacher goals	4. Change
5. Success	5. Data
6. Teachers	6. Goals
7. Teacher inquiry	7. Larger system
8. Struggles and tension	8. Literacy teaching: materials
9. Context	9. Literacy teaching: reading
10. Outside the school	10. Literacy teaching: Text Choice
11. Community	11. Literacy teaching: vocabulary
12. Personnel in the school	12. Literacy teaching: writing
13. School expectations	13. Outside influence
14. School organization	14. Perception of students
15. Attendance	15. Perception of teachers and grade level teams
16. Parents	16. Philosophies
17. Schools decisions (decisions that affect teaching and curriculum)	17. Professional Development
18. Instructional decisions	18. Reform efforts: alignment
19. Teaching	19. Reform efforts: common assessments
20. Standards and policies	20. Reform efforts: district level
21. Classroom	21. Reform efforts: Literacy coach
22. Compliancy	22. Reform efforts: Reading Specialists
23. Awareness of a larger system	23. Reform efforts: school level
24. Resistance	24. Reform efforts: team planning
25. Views of students	25. Reform efforts: testing
26. Grades	26. Reform efforts: Tutoring
27. Student learning	27. Relationships
28. Sharing	28. School organization: instructional team
29. Across the school year	29. School organization: lower versus upper grades
30. ELL students	30. School organization: Resources
31. Education	31. School organization: Teacher leadership
32. Emotions	32. Source of influence
33. Assessments	33. Standards and Policies
34. Test preparation	34. Success
35. Testing	
36. Data	
37. Feelings/emotions connected to testing	

38. Grouping students 39. Assessments that support literacy teaching 40. Teaching reading skills that are connected to TAKS 41. Interventions 42. Teaching writing 43. Sharing 44. Content 45. Informational writing 46. Ideas about writing 47. Writing Workshop 48. Conventions in writing 49. Writing process 50. Writing life 51. Writing conferences 52. What reading is 53. Reading conferences 54. Procedures 55. Reading responses 56. Reading Workshop 57. Teacher read alouds 58. Assessing reading 59. Checking for comprehension via questioning 60. Text choice 61. Different ways to read 62. Teaching reading 63. Strategies for reading 64. Teacher moves 65. Preparing for testing 66. Talking as part of literacy teaching 67. Ideas about literacy 68. Planning for literacy teaching 69. Literacy at home 70. Poetry 71. Materials for teaching 72. Talking about books 73. Literacy in content areas	35. Teacher group 36. Teacher response to reform: language of instruction 37. Teacher response to reform: literacy teaching 38. Teacher response to reform: reading specialists 39. Teacher response to reform: Resistance 40. Teacher response to reform: test preparation 41. Tension and Struggle 42. Testing 43. Timeline

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

10/07/11
For the teachers in this setting, literacy teaching is largely in response to testing, both formal and informal. Formal assessments include the TAKS test for grades 3-5, and informal assessments include common assessments (teacher developed assessments that are used for an entire grade level to test a skill on a weekly basis) and benchmark assessments (tests administered in December and in the spring that are similar to the TAKS test and used as a predictor of how students will score on the TAKS test). Once TAKS testing is over, teachers have a sense that their teaching can be different. They feel like they can return to more purposeful, authentic teaching.

Examples:

Using the data taken from assessments to determine various aspects of teaching (i.e., grouping, interventions, language of instruction, skills)	*The data influences much of what happens next year, everything from the language of instruction I'll be teaching, rearranging guided reading groups based on need, which TEKS we will focus on during whole group and guided, which students will be getting tutored and pulled by the interventionists.* (Sasha, 4th grade bilingual teacher, Interview 12/15/10)
Reading specialist uses TAKS passages with small groups of students because that is what she is told to do	*My group from 8:00-8:30. They come in and we do passages because that's what we were told to do. I am changing the style a little. I have them read with a partner to change the pace from the beginning. When I give them the passage I say, look no questions. After we read, then on Tuesday we do questions. I pair them up to do questions together. Go back to text and look for evidence. Little prizes, immediate feedback, not let's wait until the end of the week. They're tired. We were told to do passages, so that's what we're doing.* (Elena, bilingual reading specialist, Interview 01/10/11)
Using words and skills in teaching that will help students be familiar with the language used in the TAKS test	*One thing I made real big this year was vocabulary and I tied it into spelling so they'd have to do it every week. But collecting words, you know, that we read in books. But also bringing in character traits and making those vocabulary words so they could better, first of all so they could understand the language of their TAKS test, which is sometimes for some of these guys really, really hard as English language learners. So any way, adding character traits and just juicy words all over the place and making them responsible and holding them accountable with tests and quizzes on vocabulary. That's been great, for me. So there's one thing that we've done.* (Rory, 4th

	grade teacher, Interview 05/11/11)
Altering the amount of time allotted for reading and writing depending on the test they are preparing for	*We forgot about writing whenever we did the TAKS camp, so we are going back to writing. To do more compositions and for them to go back to the concept of what is a sentence, all those grammar rules. So we've extended the writing time. So we shortened the reading and extended the writing.* (Arturo, 3rd grade bilingual teacher, 05/09/11 Interview)
Teacher creates questions that are similar to questions found on the TAKS test	*In reading, a lot of authentic literature is gone because we're doing TAKS camp. Even if I'm doing something like Harriet Tubman, it's very TAKS looking and the questions are TAKS like. Now I'm sending homework that I didn't send a few months ago.* (Celestina, 3rd grade bilingual teacher, Interview 04/05/11)
Using assessment data to determine what skills to work on in small groups	*I think it's necessary to look at the assessments and see what the kids know and what they need to work on. I do think that it kind of shapes more what I do with my guided reading time. If I see they are struggling with inference, I can address that more with all the kids that are struggling during guided reading time. That's what I use a lot of that data for.* (Evelyn, 3rd grade teacher, Interview 04/06/11)
Literacy teaching and planning is dictated by the TAKS test	*The literature block is pretty much dictated by TAKS. It's all focused on that. It's not really anything we have control over. It's whatever we're supposed to be teaching with TAKS and it's the strategies we teach for TAKS. So there's very little lead way to do anything else than what we're told. When we do the planning, we all do the same things. Basically learning how to tackle different kinds of questions for different criteria.* (Paula, 3rd grade teacher, Interview, 04/21/11)
Literacy teaching involves using TAKS questions	*I had a similar experience and I think it's because we're in a TAKS grade. I think being in a TAKS grade puts those expectations on you as a literacy teacher, but I also got messages that I got to see in my class that you learn to get better, you read to get better at reading, and you read more to get better at everything else. But at the end of the day it was always a TAKS question. But we really did try and get the kids to read for fun and make it enjoyable, and it's kept up all year. I was really surprised at how the kids are still wanting to read different chapter books. But I did see a lot of those TEKS having to be met and when we did read alouds, inference questions, summarizing questions. It was always TAKS based.* (Brisa, student teacher in 5th grade with Russell, Interview 05/05/11)

The reading materials for test preparation are not the same as using real literature. When preparing for the test, the focus is on testing rather than on reading habits.	*In reading [after TAKS] I want to go back to nice rich read alouds. I'll probably do a chapter book and then revisit all those reader habits, like reader response journals, book nooks, picking a just right book. All of that which sounds silly to be doing that at this time in the year, but we haven't had time to talk about those things because of TAKS. So there's no room for that and the only reading they've been doing, I mean they have independent reading and the reading I give them for homework but really the only reading that they've been accountable for is TAKS-style reading. I think they've forgotten what real literature is and what real texts feel like.* (June, 4th grade bilingual teacher, Interview 05/05/11)

APPENDIX D: CHART USED TO DEVELOP THE CATEGORY OF TEST PREPARATION

1. FEELINGS ABOUT TEST PREPARATION	
Tension teacher has about test preparation (not real reading, motivating students, want students to be successful)	**P 2: TRANS_INT_FINAL_RORY.doc** That TAKS group was hard for me because I *do* want us to sit down and stop and say you know what, I don't really think this is real reading but you have to get through it but I don't want them to think, oh it's not real reading! Ha ha ha! I don't really care, because I do care about their success. So what do I do? I give them stickers on cards and I try to get them motivated and I try and sympathize with them. Yeah, I know you're tired and this really stinks. It's hard to keep focused on black print on white paper and ABCD all day long for a month. But you know, I always liked testing. I am kind of a dork like that. I thought they were fun and puzzling and I could solve them and so I try to bring that into it. Like how do you solve it? How are we going to beat this test? How are we going to make it fun to answer, which it isn't. I don't know. Lots of chart Writing to a prompt as part of test prep s. I feel really like I wanted them to all have notebooks. I feel like writing stuff down, at least for me, taking notes on what people are saying helps me understand it better and drawing pictures and putting stars around things and changing the color of my marker. I let some of them use markers. Some of them don't care but other ones just wanted to have color on their page. I guess that's the beginning of bridging it. Because really I understood it more this year though. I felt really like an investigator and oh man, guys, guess what I totally figured out last night. In these kinds of questions, the answers to these are always like this, so if you can just figure out which one is this answer and which one is that answer then you just have to you know choose the best one out of the last two. Whatever. That's how I felt. It felt kind of obsessive. And I had to part all of this stuff that I figured out because it really doesn't bother me because like I said, I don't mind taking them, I like figuring out how to solve things and the tricks and the hooks and so I tried to give them all that. But then they're telling me but my teacher's telling me it different and she taught it a different way and at that point I say you know what, whatever your teacher taught you or feels good to you, that's what you need to do because I can't, I want you to take me with a grain of salt. On the one hand, take me with a grain of salt, what I say at this point, either you take it or leave it. Oh gosh, I really want you to pass so if you don't know anything, hold onto this. This is a good thing. And all the time sort of feeling hyped up and crazy and still trying to use my kind words. It's a mess, that month. And I'm looking over there because I feel it, I feel it coming off of that table. Ughh! It's not fun, it's not circle time, it's not people joining voices together, although it kind of is. Maybe we should have done it on the carpet. But oh then I don't have a big screen to show them what I'm doing and there's so much about what goes on on your paper, when really reading doesn't have to do with underlining and stuff specifically. I could probably go on forever. It was hard. I did a lot better job this year than last year though, because I felt like I understood the test and then they're going to on and change it so I'll have to be figuring it out again. **P75: TRANS_INT_SECOND_SASHA.doc** The data influences much of what happens next year, everything from the language of instruction I'll be teaching, rearranging guided reading groups based on need, which TEKS we will focus on during whole group and guided, which students will be getting tutored and pulled by the interventionists. The bilingual teachers have decided to split their class for TAKS models in order to better serve these students. Instead of trying to squeeze a TAKS model in both languages within one setting we each will be modeling

	the TAKS in one language. I will be working with a small group of spanish students. Data days always make me wonder if I'm doing the right thing. I guess it depends on what you think is right, getting good scores or trying to develop independent thinkers? As much as I know that developing independent thinkers and problem solvers it gets more difficult to teach with this goal in mind when there is a great pressure to do TAKS drills more and more often it becomes harder to do what I feel is best for my students. I'm fearful of what will become of our writing block as we gear up for Writing Camp with basically is TAKS models and practice for writing. I feel like I haven't prepared my students for the drastic change that will come but am also hopeful that they will be able to use their experiences in their writer's notebook to create beautiful stories like they always do except for TAKS. We shall see. **P14: TRANS_INT_FINAL_ELENA.doc** The majority because I'm not doing lessons I would like to do like pulling a book or doing a play. M: A chance for anything like that? E: "Yes, after TAKS. Hopefully in May. It's sad because our kids know it too. They'll say, when are we going to get to read those books." **P21: TRANS_INT_FINAL_LEAH.doc** Still need to work on it so when it's TAKS time and they are like you have to do all this TAKS stuff. I don't want to do it. I want to do guided reading and book study. "It's hard to choose between what they're telling you and what you think is right." Guided reading is still a struggle around TAKS time. **P27: TRANS_INT_FINAL_ROLANDO.doc** On the other hand, the 'roadmaps' and the yearly outline are very helpful; but, when our schools changes the path then I think that the credibility and consistency are lost to the focus of "the test questions" -I wish I could implement the joy of teaching and the thrill of learning for learning sake! Why are standards and policies created, if they are going to be revamped by the individuals or "the powers to be" within campuses?
TAKS prep makes it feel like purpose is gone from teaching	**P15: TRANS_INT_FINAL_EVELYN.doc** "It's kind of hard right now because we're getting ready for TAKS and it feels like all purpose is gone. I'm not sure how to overcome this one month before TAKS and what to do with that time. It seems like there's no time to do the purposeful learning during this time because it's just all TAKS prep. But goals, I think to get help to be more independent in their inquiry. I think this year was a lot of guided inquiry."
TAKS prep restricts what teachers can do	**P25: TRANS_INT_FINAL_PAULA.doc** "The literature block is pretty much dictated by TAKS. It's all focused on that. It's not really anything we have control over. It's whatever we're supposed to be teaching with TAKS and it's the strategies we teach for TAKS. So there's very little lead way to do anything else than what we're told. When we do the planning, we all do the same things. Basically learning how to tackle different kinds of questions for different criteria." **P203: NOTE_RUSSELL_110211.doc** Today I met with Peter and Adalia to discuss her student teaching this semester. When

	we talked about the pacing guide, Peter said that there would be no teaching going on until after TAKS because there is so much TAKS prep going on. He said there would be a lot of shuffling around of kids depending on who needs more support. For the kids who are doing well, they will get extra science instruction and the kids who aren't doing well will have more TAKS instruction. When I said that Adalia's experience with seeing what is going on with regard to getting ready for TAKS will be valuable for her interviewing and finding a job, he said it's what it looks like in a low-SES school. **P73: TRANS_INT_SECOND_JUNE.doc** There will be a lot less freedom next semester as we gear up for TAKS. There will be many TAKS models and we are even dividing the bilingual classes up by language of testing in order to be able to only to the TAKS models once, as opposed to twice (with a bilingual class you have to do it in English for your Eng. group and in Spanish for that group). **P 3: TRANS_INT_FINAL_ARTURO.doc** In a positive or negative way? (both). "I think sometimes with the TAKS we get limited in your approach to reading. Sometimes you get limited, but sometimes it is good because you have a frame so you are not just teaching anything and everything. But sometimes you feel that you are very limited because you try to create a different unit and they say no, we need to be on this. These are the standards, these are the TEKS that we need to teach so we cannot teach something different. So in some ways they affect you, you cannot teach something else. But it means you have a frame and if your students are able to do that and this is what is required for them then that's good. At least they know something. At least they are meeting the standard. And later maybe at the end of the year you can incorporate more but I think sometimes you are really limited in what you have to teach. Sometimes I feel that way and my colleagues feel that same way. But at least we have something because if everybody is teaching something different in the classroom, if you are not aligned, how can you be sure that whatever you are teaching is the right thing to teach? But if you are aligned with the other teachers, you are thinking, okay I am doing something for my students."

APPENDIX E: DESCRIPTION OF CATEGORIES

Category	Description of Category/Notes
Administration perception of teachers	Contextual information
Background information	Contextual information
Bilingual Education: lower versus upper grades	1. Language of instruction for testing 2. Inconsistency in implementation
Change	1. Teacher practices 2. Teacher attitudes 3. Student changes 4. District interactions 5. Testing 6. School organization
Data	1. Using data to make decisions 2. Using data to keep records on students 3. Using data to keep records on teachers 4. Using data to keep records on schools 5. Importance of using data 6. Feelings about using data 7. Communicating data to parents and students Data is used to keep track of students, teachers, and schools while also used to make decisions. Emphasis is placed on using data.
Goals	1. Tension 2. School organization 3. Teaching practices 4. Students 5. Testing
Larger system	1. Tension 2. School organization
Literacy teaching: materials	Organized by level of reform effort (School or district)
Literacy teaching: reading	1. Student work 2. Philosophy about teaching reading 3. Teacher actions 4. Materials 5. Units of study 6. Structure for teaching 7. Goals
Literacy teaching: text choice	1. Children's literature to teach writing 2. Picture books to teach test skills
Literacy teaching: vocabulary	Listed by individual teacher's teaching of vocabulary (Rory, Celestina, Arturo, Rachel, Lydia)
Outside influence	Things that influenced teachers such as the university
Perception of students	Contextual information
Perception of teachers and grade level teachers	Contextual information
Philosophies	1. Philosophies literacy coach has 2. Philosophies administration has

	3. Philosophies teachers have about students 4. Philosophies teachers have about teaching 5. Philosophies teachers have about education
Professional development	1. Views about professional development 2. Professional development teachers attended outside of school 3. Professional Development created by the school
Reform efforts: alignment	1. Teachers' perspective on alignment 2. Administrators' perspective on alignment 3. Coaches' perspective on alignment
Reform efforts: common assessments	Descriptions of common assessments and procedures for them
Reform efforts: district level	1. Feelings about district 2. District surveillance and control 3. Teaching practices in response to district
Reform efforts: literacy coach	1. Literacy coach and job duties 2. Literacy coach's view of her role 3. Teachers' response to literacy coach 4. Administration's view of literacy coach
Reform efforts: reading specialist	1. Reading specialists' job duties and roles 2. Teachers' response to reading specialists 3. Tensions readings specialists have
Reform efforts: school level	1. Summer school professional development 2. Daily 5 3. WTW 4. Assessment observation form 5. TAKS model and assessment 6. Teachers expected to meet with students pulled out
Reform efforts: supporting teachers	1. How teachers are supported 2. Identifying teachers who need support 3. How teachers feel about their support
Reform efforts: team planning	1. Description of team planning meetings 2. Management of team planning meetings 3. Challenges of team planning meetings
Reform efforts: testing	1. Feelings about testing 2. Testing affects teaching 3. All grade levels use some forms of testing 4. Testing for LEP students 5. Testing affects students 6. Important to do well on testing 7. Common assessments 8. Portfolios
School organization: instructional team	Description of instruction meetings: 1. Weekly instructional meetings to make major decisions 2. Instructional meetings help identify teachers who need support 3. Coaches provide input in instructional meetings 4. Instructional meetings are a system in place for consistency
School organization: lower versus upper grades	Description: 1. Acknowledgement for the need for providing more support in primary grades 2. Primary grade teachers feel they are secondary to TAKS testing grades 3. School feels split between primary and upper grades

	4. Differences in bilingual education 5. Differences in staffing to support teachers and students
School organization: resources	1. Staffing 2. Money sources 3. Money allocation 4. Limited resources
Source of influence	Listing of different sources of influence
Standards and policies	1. State standards 2. District standards 3. Bilingual education 4. School policies 5. Teacher awareness and thoughts about standards and policies
Student teachers	Teachers' and student teachers' perspectives on having student teachers at the school
Success	1. Success related to testing 2. Success defined by testing versus personal beliefs 3. Success defined by practices in the classroom 4. Success related to students 5. Success related to teachers 6. Success related to the school
Teacher response to reform: resistance	1. Resistance to curricular materials 2. Resistance to district expectations
Teacher response to reform: test preparation	1. Feelings about test prep 2. Teaching how to take the test (preparing for test) 3. Understanding the test 4. Use of materials for test prep 5. Time used to teach test prep 6. Expectations about test prep 7. Staffing to teach test prep 8. Planning for test prep based on student data 9. Grouping students for test prep
Tensions and struggles	1. Tensions felt by literacy coach 2. Tensions felt about student teachers 3. Tensions about grades 4. Tensions about teaching expectations 5. Tension about scheduling 6. Tension with test prep strategies 7. Tension about not teaching how you want 8. Tension student teacher feels 9. Tension about personal teaching
This year versus last year	Contextual information
Timeline	1. Testing calendar 2. Student progress 3. Expectation for consistent schedules across school year 4. Class sizes across school year

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